

# Who reviews the reviewers? Who edits the editors? Many avenues for you to hold *BJSM* accountable

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*Being open and transparent creates trust* is one of the BMJ Publishing Group's nine values. Does the *BJSM* leadership team act openly and transparently to deserve the trust of our community? We put our case here but we leave the verdict to our valued readers and respected communities (including our 19 member societies who total over 12 000 subscribers).

When we consider '*BJSM*' we refer to the broad range of content that can be considered to start from [bjsm.bmj.com](http://bjsm.bmj.com). In addition to our 24 annual issues, *BJSM* is a dynamic, versatile contributor to health education and debate via >200 podcasts, 60 YouTube videos and >300 blog posts. We engage with a vast community on Facebook and Twitter—and these are two-way media where *BJSM* content can rapidly be tagged, trolled or trumpeted. In total, 4.5 million *BJSM* pages are viewed each year. If this volume of content did not generate debate and criticism it would be time to sack the Editorial team.

## AUTHORS AND *BJSM* PEER REVIEW

Peer review of around 1200 papers/year is clearly at the heart of what is produced in the 'canonical' (print, for now) version of *BJSM*. Each accepted paper passes through a three-member 'strategy committee' (editor in chief, two deputy editors) and an associate editor (who chooses at least two external reviewers). Authors can suggest reviewers and may also rule out specific reviewers. All authors and reviewers are asked to declare conflicts of interest. Final decisions are made weekly by *BJSM*'s editors (editor in chief, two deputy editors) based on the comments and recommendations by the reviewers and associate editor. One editor takes responsibility for each final decision ('handling editor').

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If an author feels a paper has been rejected in error, he or she can rebut the decision and a different editor will handle the decision and may seek an additional external opinion. We reverse primary decisions and estimate that we handle a rebuttal every 2 weeks. But let's assume a paper is rejected a second time. What avenues do authors have?

Authors are encouraged to publish elsewhere. In one case we received a grateful note from an author reporting that his paper had been accepted by *The BMJ* after our rejection. We were genuinely delighted for the authors, as we are when papers move from us to other excellent journals in our field such as the *American Journal of Sports Medicine* and *Sports Medicine* to name just two. In turn, we accept papers that were not deemed suitable at other journals (and we encourage authors to submit prior reviews to us).

## HOW CAN I EXPRESS MY DISAGREEMENT WITH *BJSM* CONTENT?

For *BJSM* to be open there must be room for conversations. What if the authors and peer-reviewers got it wrong? Dr Fiona Godlee wrote '*The BMJ* revels in criticism'<sup>1</sup> and *BJSM* should mirror this. Simple channels for prominent public criticism include

- ▶ Online Rapid Responses (eLetters)
- ▶ Formally submitted Letters to the Editor
- ▶ Formally submitted Editorials
- ▶ Comments directly after *BJSM* blogs
- ▶ Directing comments to *BJSM* social media channels (eg, by adding @BJSM\_BMJ to a tweet)
- ▶ Publishing dissent in other journals (as distinct from publishing a rejected paper in another journal)

These avenues will be familiar to most readers so we will just post a link here to *BJSM*'s 'Instructions for Authors' page (<http://bjsm.bmj.com/site/about/guidelines.xhtml>).

To provide just one example that *BJSM* publishes diverse opinions, each of the avenues bulleted above was used to respond to a paper entitled 'It is time to bust the myth of physical inactivity and obesity: You can't outrun a bad diet'.<sup>2</sup> After the paper was published online (22

April 2015) *three dissenting editorials* came to *BJSM* and we published all four papers in issue 15 of *BJSM* (July 2015). If you think our peer-review processes are flawed, or authors have engaged in publication misconduct, you can follow our complaints procedure <http://journals.bmj.com/site/authors/editorial-policies.xhtml#complaints>.

## HOW DOES *BJSM* POLICE COMPETING INTERESTS?

This is a crucial and difficult topic currently being debated the world over.<sup>3</sup> We ask authors to declare their interests widely—to err on the side of over-explaining rather than under-explaining. Our policy is to ask all authors to complete the ICJSM disclosure form <http://www.icmje.org/conflicts-of-interest/>

*BJSM* sometimes receives information about interests that a reader or reviewer feels should have been declared and we take those to authors. This has led to authors amending their declarations.

*BJSM*'s popular Facebook and Twitter channels mean that dissent can reach a large target audience immediately. Via retweets, @BJSM\_BMJ tags can reach over a million viewers. These are in addition to rapid responses and formal letters to the editor. There is much more scrutiny today than there was 10 and 20 years ago where there was no potential for a Twitter storm or a Facebook page going up to alert a global community to important facts.

In summary, *BJSM*'s editorial team and our Management Committee believe the avenues for debate are plentiful. But if we are wrong, please let us know. We will look for you on existing channels but please tell us what we should be adding.

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