

EDITORIAL POLICY FOR THE RWANDA MEDICAL JOURNAL

INTRODUCTION

The Rwanda Medical Journal (RMJ) is a peer-reviewed, scientific medical journal. All authors and articles published should meet the standards documented in this editorial policy. The RMJ accepts submissions from any country and is not limited to authors and researchers solely from Rwanda or Africa. All articles are submitted without charge (free) and will be subject to type-editing and peer review before publication.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF EDITORIAL TEAM AND JOURNAL

Timelines

The aim is for authors to receive a response within 6 weeks of submission.

Peer Review

All original articles, case reports and review articles are sent for peer review. The aim of peer review is to ensure that all authors receive feedback as well as the decision regarding their submission. Submitted manuscripts are reviewed by a minimum of two experts. The review follows a double-blind peer review process meaning that reviewers are not given any identifying features of the authors of the manuscript. Authors are provided with feedback from the peer review and this is anonymized.

Peer reviewers have five possible options:

1. Accept in current form
2. Accept after minor revision (by the journal editorial team)
3. Reject initial submission for minor revision: asking author(s) to make minor revisions and resubmit
4. Reject initial submission for major revision: asking author(s) to make significant revisions and resubmit
5. Reject initial submission fully: with no opportunity for resubmission.

Acceptance of articles for publication is dependent on the following: originality of the work, quality of the methodology, clarity of presentation of results, accuracy of statistical analysis, insightfulness of the discussion, comprehensibility of the writing, appropriate appraisal of limitations, and thoughtful presentation of implications of the study.

“Some people believe that true scientific peer review begins only on the date a paper is published.” In that spirit, the RMJ accepts letters to the editor for readers to submit comments, questions, or criticisms about published articles, and authors have a responsibility to respond appropriately and cooperate with any requests from the journal for data or additional information should questions about the paper arise even after publication (as per International Committee of Medical Journal Editors - ICMJE).

Selection of Articles

Articles are initially screened for plagiarism. Once complete, a senior editor screens articles to assess if they are appropriate to be sent for peer review. Articles should meet the aims of the journal and have sufficient quality in order to progress to not overburden peer reviewers. Articles that do not meet these basic criteria may therefore be rejected at this point without further peer review.

Articles may be sent to “type editors” at the discretion of the editorial team. Type editors are proficient/native English speakers who will amend the manuscript to enhance the grammar and spelling. Type-edited amendments are sent to the authors in Tracked changes format. Type editing does not incur a charge on the authors.

As described above, peer review is sought from a minimum of two reviewers. Based on the opinions of the reviewers, the senior editorial team makes the final decision regarding acceptance of articles. Revisions may be sought from authors prior to acceptance, the details of which are stated above.

Integrity

As per ICMJE guidance: Editorial decisions should be based on the relevance of a manuscript to the journal and on the manuscript’s originality, quality, and contribution to evidence about important questions. Those decisions should not be influenced by commercial

interests, personal relationships or agendas, or findings that are negative or that credibly challenge accepted knowledge.

As per ICMJE guidance: The RMJ does not exclude from consideration studies with findings that are not statistically significant, or studies that have inconclusive findings, but give appropriate appraisal of limitations, and thoughtful discussion of implications of the study. Such studies may provide evidence which, combined with data from other studies through meta-analysis, might still help answer important questions. The public dissemination of such negative or inconclusive findings may prevent unwarranted replication of effort, and may otherwise be valuable for other researchers considering similar work.

Confidentiality

“Manuscripts submitted to academic journals are privileged communications which are the authors’ private, confidential property, and authors may be harmed by premature disclosure of any or all of a manuscript’s details.” ICMJE guidelines are strictly followed (click here) with respect to manuscript confidentiality.

Copyright

Authors retain full copyrights of their articles. Third parties are required to obtain permission from the author before they reproduce or disseminate articles published in RMJ. The journal has no responsibility for giving permission to third parties regarding the use of articles published in RMJ.

Any article published in RMJ can be cited as a scientific reference in future articles by third parties, either in RMJ or any other journal, without prior permission from the author or RMJ.

The staff and editorial board of the RMJ make a concerted effort to ensure that the journal does not publish material that infringes copyright or includes libelous or defamatory content. If during review a manuscript is perceived to deviate from this policy, the Editor, with assistance from the expert editorial board if required, will work with authors to achieve a mutually satisfactory outcome, and ensure that no manuscripts are published in RMJ that are defamatory, libelous, or infringe copyright.

Regardless of these efforts by the staff and editorial board, the Journal is not ultimately liable for the content of articles published in RMJ; authors are the only responsible parties. Given this consideration, and in the context of fast-paced medical research, the editor recommends that all authors stay current with respect to the latest medical literature that may relate to submitted manuscripts.

Appeals and Complaints

Authors who wish to appeal a rejection of a manuscript submitted to RMJ should contact the Editor-in-chief of the journal. Please include the specific reason for the appeal, and if possible support the argument with evidence, in the form of attached journal articles or scientific references.

Authors or readers who would like to register a complaint about the RMJ should contact the Editor-in-Chief directly. If the complaint pertains to a specific article, please include the year, volume, and issue, along with the author and title of the article.

Appeals and complaints will receive a response within 4 weeks.

The journal should be aware of consequences that may spread to:

- Individual implication
- Legal and financial implication to the journal

The journal has the obligation and duty to publish corrections, clarifications, retractions and apologies when needed

The journal would appoint an independent ombudsman for unresolved internal issues.

ROLES OF EDITORIAL BOARD

Chief editor:

- To implement and ensure application of the editorial policy
- To lead on decision making processes related to articles selection, appeals and complaints

Deputy chief editors:

- To support the chief editor with her/his responsibilities

- To monitor submissions and identify peer-reviewers

Medical editor and editorial assistant:

- To provide administrative support to ensure the prompt peer-review and publication of submitted articles.

EDITORIAL EXPERT BOARD (EEB)

The EEB support the editorial board and have the following duties:

- To support the editorial board in achieving the above tasks
- To peer-review articles related to her/his area of medical expertise
- To support the board in identifying peer-reviewers
- To advocate for the journal in the wider field

RESPONSIBILITIES OF PEER REVIEWERS

The journal uses a double-blind peer review process for the review of manuscripts submitted for publication in the journal. Manuscripts submitted to journals are privileged communications that are authors' private, confidential property, and authors may be harmed by premature disclosure of any or all of a manuscript's details.

Reviewers therefore should keep manuscripts and the information they contain strictly confidential. Reviewers must not publicly discuss authors' work and must not appropriate authors' ideas before the manuscript is published. Reviewers must not retain the manuscript for their personal use and should destroy copies of manuscripts after submitting their reviews.

Reviewers are expected to respond promptly to requests to review and to submit reviews within the time agreed. Reviewers' comments should be constructive, honest, and polite. When a manuscript outcome is given to the authors the reviewers comments are provided in anonymous format. This is to provide feedback to the submitting author on how to improve the manuscript for future submission.

Reviewers should declare to the Chief Editor, any conflict of interest and recuse themselves from the peer-review process.

Peer-reviewers have the duty to:

- Be objective in their judgment: fair, unbiased, relevant, and timely
- Not level personal criticisms of authors
- Use clear and supported arguments and reliable references (not defamatory or libellous) during the review
- Respect confidentiality of materials: never discuss unpublished manuscripts, or use the information in their own work
- Obtain the editor's permission before any review request/advice/clearance related to a manuscript is discussed with colleagues (even with another reviewer)
- Address ethical aspects:
 - o Plagiarism, data fabrication, or manipulation
 - o Duplication / redundant article
 - o Ethical approval, informed consent
- Declare any conflicts of interests:
 - o Competitive
 - o Collaborative
 - o Any relationships or connections with authors, companies, or institutions connected to the manuscript.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF AUTHORS

Submission of articles

All manuscripts must be submitted online.

Once an author has prepared a manuscript according to the RMJ author instructions, they should visit the online submission website (<https://form.jotform.us/71222476691155>). Submitting to the journal is deemed as giving consent from all authors for the submission of the manuscript. All illustration materials (e.g. pictures, radiology images etc) utilized in the article submitted should be accompanied with a written permission/consent from the original authors.

Duplicate submission:

Authors should not submit the same manuscript, in the same or different languages, simultaneously to more than one journal. The rationale for this standard is the potential for disagreement when two (or more) journals claim the right to publish a manuscript that has been submitted simultaneously to more than one journal, and the possibility that two or more journals will unknowingly and unnecessarily undertake the work of peer review, edit the same manuscript, and publish the same article. By submitting a manuscript online, the author is confirming that it is an original work, and it has not been submitted to or published by another journal, even under the form of a conference proceeding.

Duplicated publication or Re-print:

Manuscripts should not be submitted to the RMJ if they have previously been published in another journal., unless the author obtains a written permission from that journal for re-print Submission of conference abstracts, pending or confirmed, is acceptable.

Revision of articles

Revisions of articles aim to achieve three goals:

- To improve the arguments based on existing data
- To identify where more data are needed
- To improve the clarity and coherence

Based on the decision of the Editorial team, the following processes will apply:

1. **Accepted in current form:** The author will not be asked to review the manuscript. Small typographical changes may be made by the editorial team.
2. **Accepted with minor revision:** The RMJ Editorial team will make minor changes to the text for clarity and length, but will not substantially alter the content of the piece. Once the revised manuscript has been reviewed and approved by the author, the manuscript will be submitted as “a fully revised/approved article”, and will not be again subject to peer review.
3. **Rejected initial submission for minor revision.** The initial submission is rejected, and the author(s) are asked to make minor revisions (tracking the changes in the previous submission) and resubmit. After the author completes the revisions, he resubmits the manuscript as a “revised/re-submitted article.” Any comment from the editorial or peer-review team should be addressed IN THE MANUSCRIPT (a separate file addressing the comments should NOT be provided). It is then reviewed by a member of the editorial board and If accepted in this form, it will go directly to publication. Minimal typographic changes, and small edits for length and clarity, can be suggested by the editor and approved by the author at this time. If, however, at his point the manuscript is rejected for further significant revision, it will be non-publishable, as stated in section 4a below.
4. **Rejected initial submission for major revision.** The initial submission is rejected, and the author(s) are asked to make significant (major) revisions (tracking the changes in the previous submission) and resubmit. After the author completes the revisions, he resubmits the manuscript as a “revised article.” It is then reviewed by a member of the editorial board and If accepted in this form, it will go directly to publication. Minimal typographic changes, and small edits for length and clarity, can be suggested by the editor and approved by the author at this time. If, however, at this point the manuscript is rejected again for further significant revision, it will be considered non-publishable, as stated in section 4a immediately below.
5. **Fully rejected initial submission with no opportunity for revision nor resubmission.**

Any manuscript rejected on two occasions will not be accepted for re-submission. This is deemed as non-publishable work.

On re-submission, authors should submit two copies: 1) a “clean” copy, that includes no comments or tracked changes, and 2) a copy that clearly shows every revision made from the original version (e.g. with tracked changes).

Submission of an article to RMJ indicates consent for the journal to use, reproduce, or disseminate all “published articles” without any modification. The authors keep the right to modify (for their own use), use, reproduce or disseminate their articles at their wish regardless of the peer review outcome and/or process.

The approved articles in their revised format will be sent to the author for immediate (<1 week) final approval prior to publication. The full-text of articles accepted for publication are immediately and permanently archived in the journal central database.

Authorship

Authorship matters. The RMJ concurs with the recommendations of the ICMJE (International Committee of Medical Journal Editors) in respect to “Defining the Role of Authors and Contributors”

<http://www.icmje.org/recommendations/browse/roles-and-responsibilities/defining-the-role-of-authors-and-contributors.html>

Authorship is based on the following four criteria:

- Substantial contribution to the conception or design of the work; or the acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of data for the work; AND
- Drafting the work or revising it critically for important intellectual content; AND
- Final approval of the version to be published; AND
- Agreement to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

All those designated as authors must meet all four criteria for authorship, and all who meet the four criteria should be identified as authors. Those who do not meet all four criteria should be acknowledged in the manuscript.

Submissions should be signed by all authors involved. All the authors share legal responsibility for the content of the manuscript. The RMJ does not hold legal responsibility for the content of the manuscript. The authors keep the full copyright of the material.

Consent for submission

The core mission of the RMJ is to publish articles of originality and authenticity. Among the journal's aims and objectives is to maintain constant performance improvement in this regard.

Submission of a manuscript implies that all authors have read and given consent to its submission and publication. In doing so, all authors are bound by the internal rules of the RMJ, and are in "agreement to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved" as per ICMJE guidelines.

The RMJ is not responsible for violations of accuracy and integrity that may be perpetrated by authors prior to and during the publication process. The RMJ editorial group does not independently verify the accuracy and integrity of the data reported to the journal by authors. Legal responsibility for the veracity of the data and the accuracy of statistical analysis falls upon the authors of each journal article, who bear shared legal liability for the truthfulness of the content submitted to the RMJ.

Protection of Research Participants

The editorial board follows the guidance of the ICMJE in respect to the protection of research participants <http://www.icmje.org/recommendations/browse/roles-and-responsibilities/protection-of-researchparticipants.html>

Ethical standards for all manuscripts should follow internationally recognized ethical standards and guidelines, namely:

- The Helsinki Declaration
- AERA, BERA for educational researchers
- WHO guidelines
- Local and national guidelines issued by regulatory authorities from the country of submission

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval

For experimental studies the author should report the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reference code in the manuscript.

For clinical trials, registration with a suitable public registry is not a requirement but is strongly encouraged. The name of the registry and any applicable registration number should be included with submission of the article. The publication of unregistered scientific work is permissible, but may be subject to a more rigorous verification and review process.

Among the acceptable registries to which trials should be reported include:

- Rwanda: <http://www.rnecrwanda.org/>
- ICJME: www.icmje.org/faq.html
- WHO International Clinical Trials Registry Platform: <http://www.who.int/ictrp/network/primary/en/index.html>
- NIH: <https://clinicaltrials.gov/>

The trial registration number should be included as the last line of the manuscript abstract.

Consent

All studies should describe processes of consent from human subjects. The ICMJE give guidance on consent studies (<http://www.icmje.org/recommendations/browse/roles-and-responsibilities/protection-of-researchparticipants.html>)

For studies in which research subjects spoke a language other than English, the authors should confirm that they provided consent forms in the subjects' primary language. If a majority of research subjects were illiterate, the authors should specifically address how consent was obtained in these cases.

For case reports where the identification of the patient may be possible, written consent of the patient must be provided. If all reasonable steps have been taken to remove potential identification of the patient then consent is not necessary.

Plagiarism

The editorial team takes plagiarism seriously and uses plagiarism software (Grammarly) to screen all submitted articles. The position of the RMJ is that any plagiarism destroys the entire credibility of an article. As such, if the journal detects even a small amount of plagiarism, the result will be immediate and full rejection of the article. In cases where significant plagiarism is identified, the editorial team may, at their discretion, inform the Chair of the Department of the lead author of the article.

Conflicts of Interest

Public trust in the scientific process and the credibility of published articles depend in part on how transparently conflicts of interest are handled during the planning, implementation, writing, peer review, editing, and publication of scientific work. A conflict of interest exists when professional judgment concerning a primary interest (such as patients' welfare or the validity of research) may be influenced by a secondary interest (such as financial gain). Perceptions of conflict of interest are as important as actual conflicts of interest.

Financial relationships (such as employment, consultancies, stock ownership or options, honoraria, patents, and paid expert testimony) are the most easily identifiable conflicts of interest and the most likely to undermine the credibility of the journal, the authors, and of science itself. However, conflicts can occur for other reasons, such as personal relationships or rivalries, academic competition, and intellectual beliefs. Authors should avoid entering into agreements with study sponsors, both for-profit and non-profit, that interfere with authors' access to all of the study's data or that interfere with their ability to analyze and interpret the data and to prepare and publish manuscripts independently when and where they choose." (ICMJE, 2017)

Authors are required to declare any competing financial or other interest during online submission. Authors are required to declare any conflicts of interest. It is the responsibility of the authors to remain informed of conflict of interest regulations and abide by them. The RMJ is not responsible for ethical conflict of interest violations that may be perpetrated by authors prior to and during the publication process. Legal responsibility for the veracity of the conflict of interest statements published in the RMJ fall upon the authors of each journal article.

Authors who wish to publish with RMJ are required to complete a conflict of interest form, declaring (ICMJE):

- Authors' conflicts of interest
- Sources of support for the work, including sponsor names along with explanations of the role of those sources, if any, in study design, data collection, data analysis, manuscript preparation, and the decision to submit for publication (If the funding source had no role in these decisions, the author must submit a statement declaring so).
- Whether the funding source had access to the study data, with an explanation of the nature and extent of access, including whether access is on-going Editorial freedom

As per ICMJE guidance the Editor-in-Chief has "full authority over the entire editorial content of the journal and the timing of publication of that content."

<http://www.icmje.org/recommendations/browse/roles-and-responsibilities/journal-owners-and-editorialfreedom.html>

Policy Timeline:

Reviewed by editorial board: February 2018

Approved: 1st March 2018 (Senior editorial board meeting)

Review date: 1st March 2020