Unpacking peer review together: Using group peer review to improve scholarship and foster community

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Sessions on Medical Education

Faculty can gain valuable skills by reviewing for medical education journals; however, many faculty members lack the initial skillset and confidence to become a reviewer. Reimagining peer review as a group activity is one solution that has seen limited use despite its many potential benefits. The purpose of this session is to familiarize participants with the peer-review process and introduce them to the concept of group peer review. Ultimately, the session is intended to move participants closer to becoming capable reviewers.

Presenters:
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Deborah Simpson, PhD, Director, Medical Education Programs, Aurora Health Care; Deputy Editor, Journal of Graduate Medical Education
David Sklar, MD, Professor, University of New Mexico School of Medicine; Editor-in-Chief, Academic Medicine
Gail Sullivan, MD, MPH, Professor, University of Connecticut School of Medicine; Editor-in-Chief, Journal of Graduate Medical Education
Shari A. Whicker, EdD, MEd, Assistant Professor, Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine
Lalena M. Yarris, MD, MCR, Associate Professor, Oregon Health and Science University; Deputy Editor, Journal of Graduate Medical Education

Facilitator: Anthony R. Artino, Jr., PhD, Professor, Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences; Deputy Editor, Journal of Graduate Medical Education; Assistant Editor, Academic Medicine

Learning Objectives: By the end of the session, participants will be able to…
1. Identify appropriate situations for group peer review;
2. Recognize the steps to an effective scholarly, peer-review process;
3. List several “insider tips” from journal editors of use to participants as authors, reviewers, and readers;
4. Conduct a group peer review of an article; and
5. State the benefits and drawbacks of group peer review as compared to individual peer review.

Session Plan: Faculty can gain valuable writing skills and critical literature appraisal skills by reviewing for medical education journals. However, many faculty members lack confidence in evaluating some study elements, such as methods and results, and have received little instruction on how to best construct a high-quality peer review. While faculty are rightfully cautious about adding any new “volunteer work” to their already overcrowded schedules, reviewing manuscripts provides regular opportunities for self-directed, faculty development, and can generate opportunities to write commentaries and position papers and/or to join editorial boards. In addition, faculty who review in a particular area can stay abreast of the latest research initiatives and curricular innovations, as well as note potential collaborators for future activities such as workshops and symposia.

Reimagining peer review as a group activity may have additional benefits in some situations, such as for particularly complex manuscripts and/or for those which have received widely disparate individual reviews. A group peer review process will also enable junior faculty and trainees to gain skills and confidence through discussion with peers or more senior reviewers. In doing so, they can receive mentorship on skills that are similar to those used when critically
evaluating the literature, but nuanced in the ways that these reviews are structured and delivered. Recognizing that high-quality reviewers are critical to improving scholarship in the field, developing a cadre of skilled reviewers benefits not only the journals themselves but also the field of academic medicine more broadly. Further, group peer review can foster local, regional, or remote communities of practice around educational innovation and scholarship.

The purpose of this session is to familiarize participants with the peer-review process and move them closer to attaining the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to become a capable reviewer. Further, this session will introduce participants to the concept of group peer review and its potential benefits (1-3). After a brief overview of the peer-review process, conducted by editorial members of two medical education journals (Academic Medicine and the Journal of Graduate Medical Education), participants will work in small groups to review sections of an actual submitted manuscript. Following the small-group review activity, participants will come together to discuss their findings, share their written comments, indicate their group’s publication recommendation, and compare/contrast their reviews to the actual reviews that were submitted to the journal by individual reviewers. The session will end with a large-group discussion about the pros and cons of group peer review and the specific tools and strategies that might facilitate a high-quality, collaborative process that positively impacts the development of a constructive peer review.

Session agenda:

Introduction and orientation to session. The agenda will be introduced, and Drs. Sklar and Sullivan will provide a brief overview of the peer-review process as well as “insider tips” to improve the odds of success as an author.

Sklar & Sullivan
Large group
15 mins.

Group peer-review. Participants will form small groups facilitated by an experienced peer reviewer (a session facilitator) and will complete three tasks:

(1) Each group will review a section of a journal article (e.g., the introduction, method, results, or discussion) using a reviewer worksheet to facilitate this process. Groups will then co-construct the final ratings, the overall recommendation, and review narrative.
(2) The facilitator will provide the group with a copy of the actual reviews conducted by journal reviewers to compare and contrast their group’s peer reviews with the actual reviews submitted to the journal.
(3) The groups will discuss difficulties, pros and cons of group peer review, specific tools and strategies that might facilitate or improve the group peer review approach, application to their own settings, and lessons learned from the session.

*Note: upon entry into the room, participants will indicate their publishing and reviewer experience, and will be seated to ensure each table has a mixture of experience level (e.g., novice, intermediate, expert).

All presenters and the facilitator
Small groups (4-8 people/group)
40 mins.

Large group interactive session. Small groups will report out their overall recommendation and 1-2 key points learned through the compare/contrast activity, beginning with groups focused on the introduction and quickly rotating through the rest of manuscript sections. Key recommendations for the group peer review process will be shared by small group facilitators and then discussed/summarized by workshop leaders. Finally, the journal editors will summarize the processes used by their journals to facilitate and support group peer review.

All presenters and the facilitator
Large group
20 mins.


Level of Audience: Early-career

Focus of Presentation: UME, GME, CME

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