



Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

PUBLICATION POLICIES OF HEALTH JOURNALS

A Report for the
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

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November 2007

Acknowledgments

This report was commissioned by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The author gratefully acknowledges the assistance of Foundation staff, especially David Colby and Molly McKaughan. The following journal editors and staff who were interviewed gave generously of their time and insights in shaping the themes presented in the report:

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Project Overview and Goal

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) grants often result in reports or papers that are published in peer-reviewed journals. RWJF is also interested in disseminating research findings as widely as possible. For example, RWJF posts findings in Grant Results reports, writes abstracts and provides full texts of reports or articles on its Web site.

The Foundation defers these postings if there is a chance that Web-site posting will jeopardize publication of papers in peer-reviewed journals. At times these deferrals have resulted in long delays between the completion of the research and its availability on rwjf.org.

The goal of this project is to speed up the posting of results and findings from grants on the RWJF Web site for journals with policies that allow such postings.

RWJF staff identified 35 journals whose editors would be interviewed by telephone about their policies regarding publishing articles if findings have been posted on Web sites. Interviews were preceded by research on journal Web sites.

There were two redundancies in the list, yielding 33 journals for interview. The author conducted interviews with all editors ranging from 20 to 40 minutes.

1. In general, journal editors want to support the timely release of information in a variety of venues. However, they find it hard to do this while protecting the interests of their journal and complying with requirements from publishers. Increasing use and credibility of the Internet have put this struggle on the front burner.

These challenges led several editors to comment that they are glad RWJF is analyzing this topic and hope there will be some follow-up resulting from the interviews. Of 33 editors interviewed, 15 commented that this is an important issue for them, and five of those specifically asked for copies of the final report.

2. Editors cited different reasons behind their policies:
 - Three believe it irresponsible to post information on any Web site before it has been peer-reviewed.
 - Twenty-one editors indicated they wanted to be sure that their journals publish only “new” information and are not interested in information that is “old” or already available to their readers.
 - Three editors said their journals could publish so few articles that they do not want to duplicate what readers can find elsewhere. Their policies are based on the shortage of print space in their journals.
3. Many editors appeared to be open to fast-track articles if that was important to RWJF or to preview examples of what RWJF wanted to post and trying to accommodate those requests.

Fourteen said they would take calls from authors or RWJF program officers about particular requests to post findings. These editors said they would examine the text RWJF wanted to post and try to accommodate it.

Two of the 14 noted they would prefer that authors place these calls. If RWJF were to call, it should be made clear that RWJF is not pressuring the journal to publish a particular paper.

4. While many had journal-specific guidelines, there are three formal policy statements regarding publishing “original” information that cross journals. These are:
 - International Committee of Medical Journal Editors. “Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals: Writing and Editing for BioMedical Publication,” Updated February 2006. See [Appendix A](#) for a copy of the relevant section of these requirements. The complete set of requirements can be found at www.icmje.org/.
 - A Statement Developed by a Group of Editors That Publish Articles on Health, Health Services, and Health Policy. Journals currently using this statement include:
 - *Health Affairs*
 - *Health Services Research*
 - *Inquiry*
 - *Journal of Health Politics, Policy and Law*
 - *Journal of Health Services Research & Policy*
 - *Medical Care*
 - *The Milbank Quarterly*.

The statement appears on the Web site of participating journals. See [Appendix B](#) for a complete copy of the statement.

- About eight editors mentioned the “Ingelfinger Rule” promulgated in 1969 by Franz J. Ingelfinger, then the editor of the *New England Journal of Medicine*. Ingelfinger held that no article published in the NEJM should be published elsewhere and that scientific claims in articles should be validated before disseminated. This rule prohibited authors from releasing information to the media prior to publication in peer-reviewed journals.

The statements are thorough, but issues frequently arise that are not easily determined and editors use the statements as guidelines rather than as absolute rules.

5. For those journals that do not take the most conservative approach—those that allow some information to be posted in advance of articles—the criteria are:

- Does the posted information include details about methodology, tables and charts? The more specific the information, the more likely publication of the article is in jeopardy.
- Does the posted information include “the data”? The more complete the posted data is, the more likely it will jeopardize publication of the article in the journal.
- Bulleted findings and abstracts fall into a gray area but in many cases seem acceptable or could be made acceptable after consulting with the editor.

Recommendations

- 1. If posting prior to journal publication is important to an organization, ask the authors to call the journal editor and discuss whether posting of an abstract or key findings in another report would jeopardize the article.** In these situations the authors should share the proposed text to be posted with the editor. The organization's staff can participate in these discussions, but staff should be clear that the organization is not asking the journal to publish an article.
- 2. Decide whether the content of the Web posting may be up for negotiation.** Fourteen editors indicated they would review text proposed for posting and try to accommodate it or negotiate what would be acceptable. The organization wanting to pre-publish some of the content on its Web site should decide whether this is something that is negotiable or not. It is likely that many others would do this as well, even though they did not specifically mention it.
- 3. Provide feedback from this report to journal editors.** Of the 33 editors in the sample, 31 responded quickly and warmly to the interview request and all gave generously of their time and thoughts. Five asked for a copy of the final report and some offered specific suggestions for follow-up steps that RWJF could take to give editors feedback. For example, some editors suggested that RWJF could:
 - Create an “Editor Scholars” program along the lines of its Clinical Scholars program (the *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment* provides “editorial fellowships” to researchers to help them understand the ethical issues involved in publishing research articles).
 - Convene a group of interviewed editors to discuss these important issues and consider alternatives or next steps.
 - Work with journal editors to coordinate the issuance of RWJF press releases with publication of grantee research in a journal.

International Committee of Medical Journal Editors

Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals: Writing and Editing for Biomedical Publication

Updated February 2006

III.D. Overlapping Publications

III.D.1. Duplicate Submission

Most biomedical journals will not consider manuscripts that are simultaneously being considered by other journals. Among the principal considerations that have led to this policy are: 1) 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; and 2) the possibility that two or more journals will unknowingly and unnecessarily undertake the work of peer review and editing of the same manuscript, and publish same article.

However, editors of different journals may decide to simultaneously or jointly publish an article if they believe that doing so would be in the best interest of the public's health.

III.D.2. Redundant Publication

Redundant (or duplicate) publication is publication of a paper that overlaps substantially with one already published in print or electronic media.

Readers of primary source periodicals, whether print or electronic, deserve to be able to trust that what they are reading is original unless there is a clear statement that the article is being republished by the choice of the author and editor. The bases of this position are international copyright laws, ethical conduct, and cost-effective use of resources. Duplicate publication of original research is particularly problematic, since it can result in inadvertent double counting or inappropriate weighting of the results of a single study, which distorts the available evidence.

Most journals do not wish to receive papers on work that has already been reported in large part in a published article or is contained in another paper that has been submitted or accepted for publication elsewhere, in print or in electronic media. This policy does not preclude the journal considering a paper that has been rejected by another journal, or a complete report that follows publication of a preliminary report, such as an abstract or poster displayed at a professional meeting. Nor does it prevent journals considering a paper that has been presented at a scientific meeting but not published in full or that is being considered for publication in a proceedings or similar format. Press reports of scheduled meetings will not usually be regarded as breaches of this rule, but additional data or copies of tables and illustrations should not amplify such reports.

When submitting a paper, the author must always make a full statement to the editor about all submissions and previous reports that might be regarded as redundant or duplicate publication of the same or very similar work. The author must alert the editor if the manuscript includes subjects about which the authors have published a previous report or have submitted a related report to another publication. Any such report must be referred to and referenced in the new paper. Copies of such material should be included with the submitted paper to help the editor decide how to handle the matter.

If redundant or duplicate publication is attempted or occurs without such notification, authors should expect editorial action to be taken. At the least, prompt rejection of the submitted manuscript should be expected. If the editor was not aware of the violations and the article has already been published, then a notice of redundant or duplicate publication will probably be published with or without the author's explanation or approval.

Preliminary reporting to public media, governmental agencies, or manufacturers, of scientific information described in a paper or a letter to the editor that has been accepted but not yet published violates the policies of many journals. Such reporting may be warranted when the paper or letter describes major therapeutic advances or public health hazards such as serious adverse effects of drugs, vaccines, other biological products, or medicinal devices, or reportable diseases. This reporting should not jeopardize publication, but should be discussed with and agreed upon by the editor in advance.

III.D.3. Acceptable Secondary Publication

Certain types of articles, such as guidelines produced by governmental agencies and professional organizations, may need to reach the widest possible audience. In such instances, editors sometimes choose deliberately to publish material that is also being published in other journals, with the agreement of the authors and the editors of those other journals. Secondary publication for various other reasons, in the same or another language, especially in other countries, is justifiable, and can be beneficial, provided all of the following conditions are met.

1. The authors have received approval from the editors of both journals; the editor concerned with secondary publication must have a photocopy, reprint, or manuscript of the primary version.
2. The priority of the primary publication is respected by a publication interval of at least one week (unless specifically negotiated otherwise by both editors).
3. The paper for secondary publication is intended for a different group of readers; an abbreviated version could be sufficient.
4. The secondary version faithfully reflects the data and interpretations of the primary version.
5. The footnote on the title page of the secondary version informs readers, peers, and documenting agencies that the paper has been published in whole or in part and states the primary reference. A suitable footnote might read: "This article is based on a study first reported in the [title of journal, with full reference]." Permission for such secondary publication should be free of charge.
6. The title of the secondary publication should indicate that it is a secondary publication (complete republication, abridged republication, complete translation, or abridged translation) of a primary publication. Of note, the National Library of Medicine does not consider translations to be "republications," and does not cite or index translations when the original article was published in a journal that is indexed in MEDLINE.

III.D.4. Competing Manuscripts Based on the Same Study

Publication of manuscripts to air co-investigators disputes may waste journal space and confuse readers. On the other hand, if editors knowingly publish a manuscript written by only some of a collaborating team, they could be denying the rest of the team their legitimate co authorship rights; they could also be denying the journal's readers access to legitimate differences of opinion about the interpretation of a study.

Two kinds of competing submissions are considered: submissions by coworkers who disagree on the analysis and interpretation of their study, and submissions by coworkers who disagree on what the facts are and which data should be reported.

Setting aside the unresolved question of ownership of the data, the following general observations may help editors and others dealing with these problems.

III. D.4.a. Differences in Analysis or Interpretation

If the dispute centers on the analysis or interpretation of data, the authors should submit a manuscript that clearly presents both versions. The difference of opinion should be explained in a cover letter. The normal process of peer and editorial review of the manuscript may help the authors to resolve their disagreement regarding analysis or interpretation. If the dispute cannot be resolved and the study merits publication, both versions should be published. Options include publishing two papers on the same study, or a single paper with two analyses or interpretations. In such cases it would be appropriate for the editor to publish a statement outlining the disagreement and the journal's involvement in attempts to resolve it.

III.D.4.b. Differences in Reported Methods or Results

If the dispute centers on differing opinions of what was actually done or observed during the study, the journal editor should refuse publication until the disagreement is resolved. Peer review cannot be expected to resolve such problems. If there are allegations of dishonesty or fraud, editors should inform the appropriate authorities; authors should be notified of an editor's intention to report a suspicion of research misconduct.

III.D.5. Competing Manuscripts Based on the Same Database

Editors sometimes receive manuscripts from separate research groups that have analyzed the same data set, e.g., from a public database. The manuscripts may differ in their analytic methods, conclusions, or both. Each manuscript should be considered separately. Where interpretations of the same data are very similar, it is reasonable but not necessary for editors to give preference to the manuscript that was received earlier. However, editorial consideration of multiple submissions may be justified in this circumstance, and there may even be a good reason for publishing more than one manuscript because different analytical approaches may be complementary and equally valid.

A Statement Developed by a Group of Editors That Publish Articles on Health, Health Services and Health Policy

Journals currently using this statement include: *Health Affairs*; *Health Services Research*; *Inquiry*; *Journal of Health Politics, Policy and Law*; *Journal of Health Services Research & Policy*; *Medical Care*; and *The Milbank Quarterly*.

Background:

The policy of the journals subscribing to this statement is to consider for publication only original work that has not previously been published. Questions about what constitutes previous publication are arising with increasing frequency because of the growth of electronic publishing and the increasing number of reports and papers being produced by organizations and agencies. This statement provides guidance on this issue.

There are legitimate reasons why research may be disseminated before submission to a journal. Active communication among researchers about preliminary findings or the circulation of draft reports for discussion and critique contributes to the eventual quality of published work. In addition, organizations that support or carry our research have an understandable interest in disseminating their work. From the perspective of journals, these reasons for dissemination must be balanced against two considerations. The first is the value of the peer review process. The rules against prior publication are intended to add some assurance of the credibility of published research. Papers are often improved during the peer review process, with findings, conclusions, and recommendations sometimes changed in response to reviewers' comments. The public and policymakers might be confused or misled if there were multiple versions of a paper in the public domain. Second, from a more parochial viewpoint, journal space is limited, and much time and expense are involved in the evaluation, publication, and distribution of journal articles. Journals must make difficult choices about what to include; there is less value in publishing papers that have already been disseminated to their target audiences.

We discuss here several types of dissemination and provide guidelines with respect to the prior publication question. This discussion is essentially an elaboration of two rules, the first emphasizing previous dissemination of the material, the second stressing disclosure.

Rule One: If the material in a paper has already been disseminated to a journal's audience, particularly in a format that appears to be a final product, then it is unlikely that a second version will be worth publishing in the journal.

Rule Two: It is the responsibility of authors to let editors know at the time of submission whether a paper's contents have been previously disseminated in any manner so that the editors can determine whether to proceed with the review process.

Previous Presentations at Meetings:

Presentation of a paper at conferences or seminars usually does not jeopardize the possibility of publication.

Working Papers:

Dissemination of “working papers” to a limited audience will not ordinarily jeopardize publication. Working paper series are used by many organizations as a means of enabling researchers to obtain critiques from fellow researchers. Working papers covered by this policy are those that are released by the author or an organization rather than by a publisher, are not advertised to the public, and are marked as drafts that are subject to future revision.

Internet Postings:

Release via the Internet may jeopardize journal publication under some circumstances. Presentation of the work as a final report is a marker of an attempt to reach a wide audience, particularly when combined with efforts to direct traffic to the work (e.g., via links on other sites) and efforts to attract attention (e.g., press releases). In contrast, if a document is posted on the Internet only to facilitate communication among colleagues with the aim of getting feedback, and if there has been no attempt to otherwise attract the attention of journalists, the public, or the broader research community to the document, then this is unlikely to preclude journal publication.

In general, when posting on the Internet serves similar functions as presentation at professional meetings - facilitating the development of papers and the improvement of the research, influencing future revisions, and not constituting a “finished” product - it would not be considered prior publication. On the other hand, when the Web site posting functions as a virtual version of a conventional publication, which may even be copyrighted by the posting organization, the benefit of an additional publication in the journal will be scrutinized carefully.

In cases where there has been little to no exposure at the time that a paper has been submitted to the journal, but the circumstances surrounding the posting make it likely that a high level of exposure (press coverage, etc.) might occur, then the author should remove a posting as a condition for further consideration of the manuscript.

Authors who post papers on a Web site and do not want it to constitute prior publication should also post a disclosure statement such as: “This draft paper is intended for review and comments only. It is not intended for citation, quotation, or other use in any form.” This statement should be kept on the Web site throughout the review process and until the paper is actually accepted for publication in a journal. Once accepted, authors should post a message to the effect that: “A revised final version of this paper will appear in the XXX issue of (Journal Name).” Authors also should include this statement as a header or footer on every page of the paper.

Formal Reports from Foundations, Academic Institutions, Institutes, Trade Associations, and Government Agencies:

The dissemination efforts of foundations, government agencies, research institutes, and other organizations that support or carry out research can complement publication in peer-reviewed journals. If publication in one of our peer-reviewed journals is desired, organizational publications should be timed to coincide with or follow journal publication, with appropriate copyright permissions having been obtained. This sequence ensures that the peer-review process will have an opportunity to correct deficiencies of method or presentation.

Formal, published reports that have gone through an editorial process, that have been intended to reach a wide audience, and that are publicized and available to any interested party (whether free or not) usually will not be considered for journal publication. A paper that is based on such a report might be considered for publication if it were sufficiently different in emphasis or intent. In such instances, the author should explain at the time of submission (or before) how the paper differs from the previously released report and why its publication would represent a distinct and important contribution beyond that version.

Media Publicity:

If results reported in a working paper have become widely known as a result of media exposure (or even if the potential for widespread exposure remains during review), and that working paper is readily available to interested readers (e.g., through a Web site), an editorial judgment will be made whether journal publication would be appropriate. Authors can help protect their work from unwanted media exposure by making clear on working drafts, copies presented at conferences, and other versions that it is a draft that has not yet undergone peer review for publication and that findings and conclusions are subject to change. Authors also should request that any “stories” derived from interviews with the media be embargoed until the work is published or released by the publisher (see, for example, Fontanarosa, P.B., and C.D. DeAngelis. 2002. The Importance of the Journal Embargo. *Journal of the American Medical Association* 288:748-750). Any accepted manuscript released to the media should contain the statement: “A revised final version of this paper will appear in the XXX issue of (Journal Name).” Journal policies involving author contact with members of the media may vary, depending on the issue or journal. Thus, authors should check with the editor before speaking with or distributing papers to members of the media.

Importance of Disclosure:

In contrast to the editors' decision whether a certain paper has been disseminated too widely to warrant journal publication, there is very little judgment involved in whether an author should disclose previous dissemination. Prior to, or at the time of, submission of a paper that has been disseminated in any of the ways discussed previously, authors should bring this to the attention of the editor so that a determination can be made before the paper goes into the peer-review process. In so doing, authors should describe in what form and how the work was previously disseminated and how the submitted manuscript differs from previously disseminated versions. Editors might be receptive to a modified version of a paper that has been widely disseminated if the submitted version has a different focus (e.g., more emphasis on methods, more sophisticated analytic approach, or discussion of developments that have transpired since the initial dissemination). The key point is to let editors know about any dissemination that will have, or is likely to have, occurred before the journal article is published rather than have it discovered during or after the review or editorial process. As part of the submittal, authors should include copies of other related papers that might be seen as covering the same material.

Failure to disclose could preclude publication in the journal or, if already published, could result in a notice in the journal about the failure and may result in a retraction of the article.

Information pertaining to your manuscript: You will need to indicate the following: Whether the manuscript has been previously submitted to the journal; Whether the paper has been presented at a meeting (this information will be included with the paper if it is published, so please word it just as you would like it to appear; You will also be asked to confirm that the paper has been submitted exclusively to *Health Affairs*, that it has not been previously published, that the work behind the paper meets applicable ethical standards, and that all authors are willing to take public responsibility for the work and satisfy the requirements of authorship.

Editorial Policies: Exclusivity And Prior Publication. Only papers that have not been accepted and are not under consideration by another journal are considered for publication in *Health Affairs*. Papers or parts of papers that have been published or accepted for publication elsewhere (including being posted on the Internet) are not considered. If your paper has been posted on the Internet or otherwise circulated in a preliminary form or as a working paper for a limited audience, or if your paper is associated with a longer report that either has or has not yet been released, you must inform the editors at the time of submission. You must also disclose to the editors whether or not the paper has been presented at a meeting. The editors of several health services and policy journals have released a joint statement on prior publication and disclosure; please refer to that statement for more details.