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## EDITORIAL

# Why lose the peer review

• Saturnino P. Javier, MD, FPCP, FPCC, FACC



Most scientific journals employ the peer review process for all their published manuscripts. Editorial peer review is considered a vital mechanism [a quality filter] for scholarly scientific publishing and is touted to benefit editors, authors, reviewers, readers, and researchers - by reducing or managing bias, ensuring adherence to ethical standards and thus enhancing the overall quality of the published manuscript.

The process generally involves a group of experts who critique and evaluate the merits of a manuscript submitted for publication.

Peer reviewers assist editors in making decisions about publishing a manuscript (or approving a protocol), offer guidance and feedback to authors, improve critical thinking and contribute to more polished and better written articles.

In a highly controversial 2019 *Medscape* commentary, Benjamin Mazer and John Mandrola argued that 'to maintain trust in science, lose the peer review.' This perspective negates the value of depending on scientists who are recognized subject matter experts in the overall evaluation of a written manuscript for publication or rejection. Some authorities argue that peer review is "the worst way to judge research." A Cochrane systematic review of 28 studies concluded that "little empirical evidence is available to support the use of editorial peer review as a mechanism to ensure quality of biomedical research."

The *Philippine Journal of Cardiology* (PJC) has put the peer review process in place in the last several years - employing volunteer reviewers to assist the editorial team in its assessment of contributions for publication. The PJC editorial team maintains a lineup of peer reviewers from among a group of cardiologist-representatives nominated by the different training institutions, along with outstanding Cardiology Fellows from previous years, selected medical writers and research coordinators, among others. To its credit, the Philippine Heart Association Board of Directors has continually supported the capacity-building and training of peer

reviewers through two separate symposia which aimed to enhance and sustain quality peer review.

Yet, the challenges and limitations of the peer review process have always been recognized. Not infrequently, the peer review process hampers process efficiency and flow - and thus wasting precious time and resources in the process. Peer reviewers ought to devote considerable time and focus for a job that essentially does not directly and immediately give them any benefit. The 'vulnerabilities' of the process are recognized even among the top medical journals - as cited by *British Medical Journal* editor Richard Smith. Understandably, reviewers vary greatly in their assessment and appreciation of a manuscript's strong and weak points.

Thus far, it is the intent of the PJC to maintain this system for now - a form of scientific check and balance - as peer review remains to be recognized as a valuable process to ensure the scientific soundness, relevance, applicability, credibility and integrity of published articles.

As scientific and medical trials continue to generate new findings, as innovations continue to bring about new developments and as new technology and pharmaceutical agents find their way to mainstream Cardiology practice, the need for a more systematic, unbiased, competent and focused appreciation of submitted manuscripts for publication cannot be overemphasized. It becomes imperative for subject matter experts to render their opinion and judgment on what reports and studies must find their way to the pages of the Cardiology journal.