Preprinting and Data Sharing in a New Normal?

Even as JAFES evolves to keep abreast with good publication practices, the landscape of research and publication is changing fast.

JAFES, though, is no stranger to innovation and change. A few years from its revival in 2010, the journal established its own website, invested in an editorial management system, and transitioned from print to full digital editions. Back in 2019, JAFES revisited its editorial policies, introduced standardized author forms and author declarations, and endorsed the use of EQuaTOR Network checklists to ensure completeness and promote transparency of information reporting in journal articles. We likewise began screening references for citations sourced from possibly predatory journals. Doing our part to keep our authors' trust, we also updated the journal's publishing agreement by retaining copyright for published articles to the authors and providing JAFES publishing rights. JAFES has also enhanced the communication and promotion of scientific findings through the creation of visual abstracts. This year, JAFES has begun providing information on specific author contributions based on CREDIT [Contributor Roles Taxonomy (https://credit.niso.org)], as well as disclosing editors' potential conflicts of interest.

Editorial board meetings are opportunities for discussion on emerging policies. In some international journals, authors are being asked to participate in "data sharing," to provide public access to de-identified datasets, protocols, and study materials in acceptable repositories. This discussion is timely, as next year, major funding bodies, such as the National Institutes of Health (NIH) will begin requiring researchers and its institutions to include data management plans in their grant applications, and to make the data from these funded researches publicly available. Towards this end, NIH launched the Generalist Repository Ecosystem Initiative (GREI)—a group of established data repositories (Dataverse Project, Dryad, figshare, Mendeley Data, OSF, Vivli, and Zenodo) that shall not only preserve data, but also facilitate data sharing for reuse, reproducibility, quality assurance, and, more importantly, for building new knowledge.

JAFES should carefully consider the details in adopting data sharing as a policy. What will be the form and format of the data to be archived and shared? How will it impact or change a participant's informed consent? How do these policies relate with the prevailing regulations on Data Privacy? How should data be organized, presented, and framed, to prevent misinterpretation or misanalysis?

Another development is the emergence of preprints, which may become the norm in future publications. Preprints are scientific articles that are already published online despite not having undergone or completed full peer review–a seemingly unusual concept in a research world where peer review is the most critical requirement and standard for scholarly publications. What preprints make up for despite the lack of peer review, is the swiftness of publication, which may be particularly helpful in the setting of a novel disease or public health emergency, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Issues such as article quality, ethics, citations and retractions need to be considered. JAFES will need to weigh the value of preprints as a platform for sharing knowledge, or for sharing of data for that matter.

Sharing data and using preprints are two new publication trends. JAFES continues to thoroughly review these strategies to determine how these will be useful for our journal and its readers. We expect more innovations to come. Indeed, the learning continues.

Elizabeth Paz-Pacheco
Editor-in-Chief