

Editorial

What is considered publishable?



It is interesting to hear the diverse perspectives of senior scientists and researchers on the merits of what one considers information worthy of publication. Should it only be

stunning new discoveries using state of the art technology that make it to press? Perhaps one should consider the possibility that there is value to get data and information out to the broader community and allow each individual to decide on their value. This would apply whether results be positive negative or neutral. Even reviews, personal observations and theories could stimulate exploration and thought. This philosophical question on publishing continues to be debated and surely applies across all fields of endeavor.

Take for example information related to marine animal strandings. The sentiment has been shared with me by valued colleagues that one case report on findings from a stranded marine mammal by itself has no value! That 'big data' amassed over 10-15 years forms the only basis for valued publication on the topic of strandings. Even more curious is the attitude that data on strandings should not be made public on an annual basis. The reasoning appears to follow the same principal, nothing to be learned from data from only one year. Certainly no one would argue that a larger overview is better able to identify trends over time. However, why is the short term information discarded so casually? When investigators are looking to compare regional differences, or perhaps create an updated view on current events, would 'current' annual or even monthly information not be valuable as well? Highly respected groups such as those in the U.K., Australia and Alaska, (US) stranding networks uplink annual data and make it easily available on line (1-3). Why is it others seem reticent to do the same? More and more the planet is

considered one environment and climate change has impacts everywhere. Unless we share the most current information, we can never get an accurate picture of events unfolding.

This attitude is a critical issue for journals, as the personal beliefs of editors and reviewers will influence the chances of getting published. Though journals set the tone for the type of papers that will be favored, a damning critique from reviewers with bias can do significant harm to a paper's chances of acceptance. Some examples of this follow. A case report presenting autopsy findings related to a seal shot and pellets recovered is considered anecdotal, or data from 10 beluga having levels of lead measured - represents a small sample size. Of course in a perfect world, or if publishing in a high impact journal, large numbers do serve to re-enforce findings. Does that negate the value of other work with less data - emphatically NO. How much research is repeated because the findings from previous small but well thought out studies were never published so all could be made aware of the findings. Are we not intelligent enough to decide for ourselves the value and veracity of the findings reported? Would science, knowledge and understanding not be better advanced if we were made aware of such information sooner rather than later or even never?

It is understandable that high impact and author desired publication venues such as Science and Nature are having to publish only the strongest and most extensively researched work. The high volume of submissions they receive allows them to focus only on those with the greatest and most impactful messages. However in the electronic digital age where one would think more papers can be accommodated and the existence of other reliable and legitimate journals, surely these other smaller studies could and should also be shared. Rather than place obstacles and negativity in front of aspiring authors, they should be encouraged to write up their thoughts and findings to share with all of us. Now that is not to say poorly written, badly designed or erroneous conclusions should be published - that is



Editorial Cont'd

the purpose of good peer review. However, reviewers should try to keep an open mind, as should journal editors and authors. Yes undoubtedly impact factors are important, but then what good does your work do in a filing cabinet or on your e-storage. A lower impact journal article is read just as much if the topic is of interest and the journal legitimate. Smaller data sets or one animal case reports can serve to galvanize further research, inspire early studies to be funded or collaborations to develop between specialties or across regional divides. We know this happens at meetings - why not through the medium of the written word and the journals' willingness to promote this attitude.

JMATE is committed to this concept, so we will continue to provide a venue for these works. We will always ensure, as best we can, through external peer review, that the information is valid and appropriate. Looking forward to receiving your work, thoughts and contributions and facilitate getting this exciting and valuable information out to all!

Dr Carin Wittnich
Editor-in-Chief, JMATE

References

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2. Australia strandings <https://data.marinemammals.gov.au>
3. U.K. Strandings <http://ukstrandings.org/>



Figure 1: Reproduced with permission of OERS (photographer C. Wittnich)