

More than a Manuscript: The International Journal of Medical Students as an Educational Institution

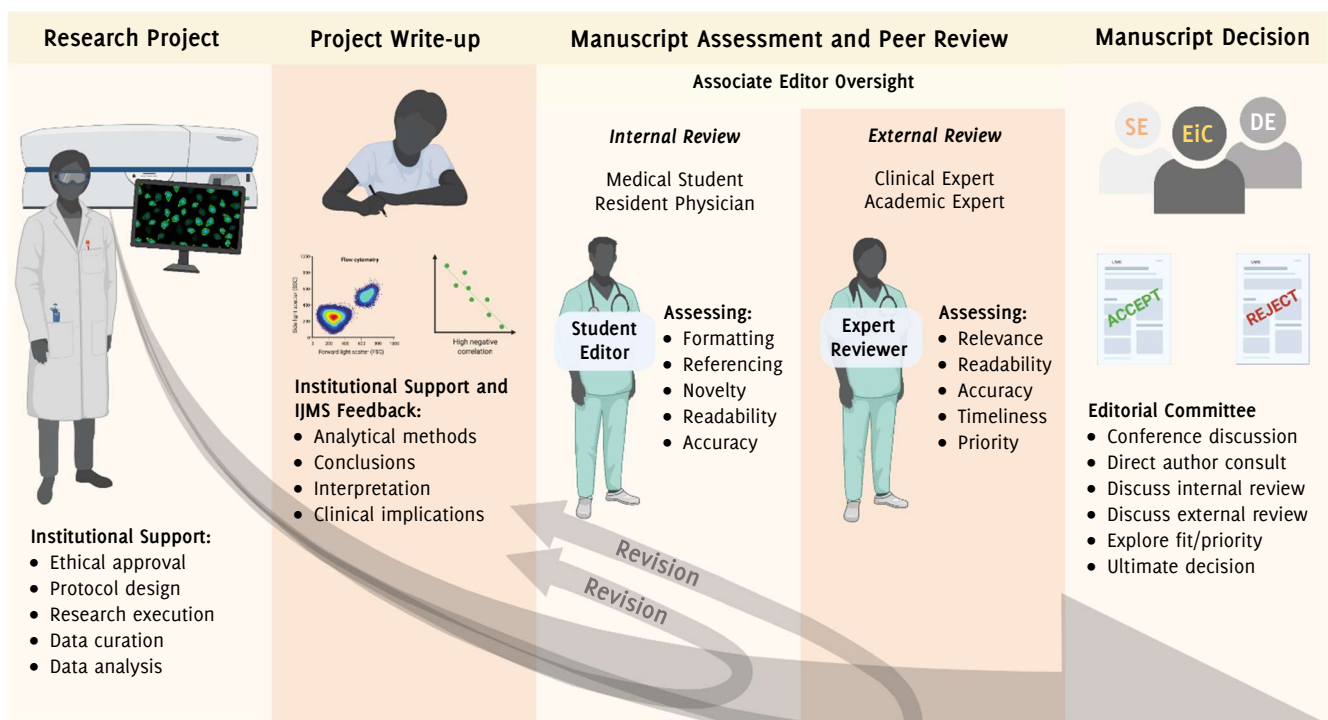
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The inherent importance of research pursuits within the medical community is a readily emphasized but often modestly instructed aspect of medical training and professional development. Learners often report widely varying degrees of opportunity, guidance and supervision across curricula and institutes (e.g., protocol design, research ethics training, data curation and analysis instruction; **Figure 1**).^{1,2} However, an expectation that graduates will automatically become capable researchers with the ability to produce or contribute to high-quality evidence persists. This occasional discrepancy between preparations and expectations leaves many first-time authors floundering and this, in my opinion, is where the *International Journal of Medical Students* demonstrates its exceptional value.

There are several aspects of the *IJMS* publication process which are unique to it as a journal and make it an unparalleled resource not only for dissemination of high-level undergraduate research output, but also for direct training of learners – submitters and assessors alike. The *Journal* is therefore, more than just that. It is also a medical education institution which affords undergraduates the supervision, feedback and

training required to bring their hard-work up to a caliber suitable for peer review and potentially international dissemination. For example, the role of the Student Editor is central to the success of *IJMS* (**Figure 1**). Student Editors, who are typically medical students or occasionally resident physicians, are responsible for the initial assessment of each of the ~30 submissions received by the *Journal* every month. Not only does this ensure the quality of submissions sent out to experts for external review, but it also serves to educate authors on the appropriate presentations of their research. This additional layer of oversight often affords authors who may have otherwise received an immediate desk rejection an opportunity to standardize their presentation and revise to a level appropriate for peer review. The process thereafter largely follows a traditional route to publication, with external expert review and ultimately, a senior editor decision; however, the delivery and content of assessments is notably different, as we aim to maintain an entirely constructive approach to feedback within the *Journal*.

Figure 1. The Publication Process of the International Journal of Medical Students Aims to Maintain Quality of Submissions and Educate Early Career Authors.



Legend: The additional layer of internal review which Student Editors provide is key to the success of the *Journal*. This allows for essential feedback early on in the process which may ultimately bring a manuscript up to the level required for traditional external peer review. SE, Scientific Editor; EiC, Editor in Chief; DE, Deputy Editor.

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Primarily as a result of the efforts of the present Scientific Editor, Dr Mihnea-Alexandru Găman, and Editor in Chief, Dr Francisco Bonilla-Escobar, standards at the *Journal* have been raised to new heights in the past few years. This current issue, which will increase the publication frequency from thrice-yearly to quarterly, is a testimony to this ever-increasing quality. However, this elevated bar pertains not only to the quality and quantity of work submitted to and published by the *Journal*, but also to the constructive quality of the review process itself. Our reviewers and editors have now been formally trained to perform high-quality, standardized reviews which aim to leave the author with a clear and impartial guide to the improvement of their manuscript. New editors undertake a probation period during which they are assessed for the strength of their reviews and their ability to manage task and meet deadlines. We have also introduced a greater degree of senior oversight, with each article undergoing final review for quality, relevance and priority Executive Committee conference (**Figure 1**).

It has been a full presidential term of office since my relationship with the *IJMS* was sparked. When I first discovered and submitted an article to the *IJMS*, I had just finished the first year of my graduate entry medicine program and I was eager to encourage any similarly minded

fellow scientists to answer the inner monologue urging them to pursue a patient-facing clinical career.³ The ethos and purpose of the *Journal* impressed me such that I soon after applied to become part of the team, taking up a role as an Associate Editor in November 2017. I have spent the last 12 months as the Deputy Editor of this truly international affair, as we aimed to rejuvenate, expand and develop the managing editorial team both in size and ability. However, the contribution which I am most proud of is the promotion of the *Journal* within my home institution, University College Cork, where over half a dozen current students and alumni have since contributed significant time, effort and expertise to *IJMS*.

In these past four years, my contributions and investments in the *Journal* have been vastly dwarfed by the returns. This educational institution has taught to me the roles, responsibilities and continuous pressures of a journal editor, and have introduced to me a diverse, international set of friends, collaborators and colleagues. As *IJMS* continues to evolve and thrive as a journal, I know that its role as an educational institution will only grow further.

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