

Voluntary Efforts in Academic Publication

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One fine Saturday, I planned to finish my backlog of tasks, which included preparing review reports for several peer review requests and addressing other editorial responsibilities. I requested my wife and children to allow me uninterrupted time for the day so that I could complete these pending tasks and free myself for the upcoming week.

It was a sunny day, and after breakfast, I began my work. As the temperature rose, I decided to have a bottle of chilled water to accompany me during my editorial tasks. To my surprise, I noticed that my refrigerator was malfunctioning. The thought of enduring a hot day without chilled water was unsettling, so I immediately called a technician. He arrived promptly and fixed the issue by adjusting a few connections. However, despite no new parts being replaced, he charged a service fee that exceeded my expectations. When I inquired about the cost, he explained that the charge primarily accounted for his time and expertise rather than just the physical repair. Acknowledging the fairness of his explanation, I agreed and paid the bill.

I then resumed my work, reviewing new submissions to the journal, assessing their quality and suitability, and analyzing reviewers' comments on various articles. Additionally, I engaged in asynchronous communication with fellow editorial board members and submitted peer review reports for other journals in my capacity as a reviewer.

By dusk, I had successfully completed my journal-related tasks and felt a profound sense of relief. However, my elder child was disappointed that I had not spent time playing with him over the weekend, and I noticed the quiet disappointment on my wife's face for not having shared any meaningful moments together. Fortunately, my younger child, too young to grasp these nuances, greeted me with a bright smile when I embraced him in the evening.

As I reflected on the day before going to bed, I realized that I had spent the entire day engaged in reviewing, editing, and other editorial responsibilities. Unexpectedly, I found myself drawing a comparison between my work and that of the refrigerator technician.

With only a few months of training and experience, he was compensated for every moment he spent working. In contrast, despite my years of university education and extensive practical experience, my editorial work was entirely voluntary. I came to the realization that I dedicate a significant portion of my time throughout the week to peer review and editorial activities—an effort often overlooked but essential to the academic and scientific community.

Voluntary peer review is a well-established tradition in the medical research and publication community, where experts in various fields contribute their time and expertise to assess the scientific relevance, methodological validity, and ethical integrity of submitted research papers. Their constructive feedback aids editors and authors in refining the quality of scholarly work. Peer review is the cornerstone of the publication process, ensuring that research meets rigorous academic standards through evaluation by experts in the same discipline. Despite its crucial role, most reviewers across global journals remain unpaid for the time and expertise they dedicate to the review process. This is certainly one of the main reasons why editors today struggle to find a good reviewer who could provide genuine and critical feedback to the research work.

Besides peer reviewers, journal editors also play a pivotal role. These experts, possessing strong academic and writing skills, oversee the entire publication cycle—from initial screening to final publication. They coordinate with reviewers, ensure compliance with publication ethics, enhance readability, and make key decisions regarding manuscript acceptance, revision, or rejection. Unfortunately, editorial board members in most journals also serve without financial compensation. Like peer reviewers, they contribute their time and expertise to facilitate the dissemination of novel research, ensuring that high-quality scholarly work reaches its intended readership through journal publications.

Some journals are managed by professional associations that do not charge authors article processing fees and is available freely to all as open

access without any subscription. For such journals, voluntary peer review and editorial contributions are justified. However, many journals impose substantial article processing charge, including additional charges for rapid processing and color images. Despite these financial gains, they continue to rely on voluntary peer review and editorial work, which raises questions about fairness in the system. Many scientific publishers have generated significant revenue by charging authors high processing fees while simultaneously relying on unpaid labor from peer reviewers and editorial board members.¹ Additionally, they collect subscription fees from readers to access the very research that was paid by authors, reviewed and edited by experts without compensation.

This is a serious matter to be discussed in the academia. Along with payments from authors through article processing charges and from readers through subscription fees, academic publication relies on the voluntary contributions of peer reviewers and editors. Many publishers continue to generate significant profits while key stakeholders remain unpaid, creating a considerable imbalance. Undervaluing the efforts of peer reviewers and editors may ultimately compromise both the quality and long-term viability of this model. It is time to initiate a serious discussion on equitable compensation for all stakeholders involved in the publication process, ensuring that academic integrity takes precedence over commercial gains.

REFERENCES

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