



Peer Review in Early Career: Just Say Yes!

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Early career psychiatrists are faced with a host of academic and personal pressures, are usually strapped for time, and can be struggling in an increasingly harsh research funding environment and an academic environment that demands more clinical work and teaching with limited compensation. Why then should they consider serving as journal peer reviewers?

Despite the above constraints, I believe serving as a peer reviewer provides distinct career advantages. First and most importantly, peer review provides training in the same kind of critical thinking required to write a successful grant or publish a paper in a high quality journal. This kind of thinking cannot be taught easily either didactically by experts or via

selected readings. It requires iterative practice, ideally under the trained eye of a faculty mentor, who can provide expert guidance to the novice peer reviewer. Effective peer review involves the ability to evaluate the significance and importance of a study or review paper in light of extant knowledge codified in publications and the capacity to determine if the methods employed are appropriate and valid for the task at hand. It is the process and practice of doing this repetitively, and getting accurate feedback about how close one is coming to the target, that hones one's critical thinking ability and makes one more expert. Successful peer reviewers learn to say more with fewer words and to articulate their opinions in a terse and succinct



manner. As an editor, I most value clear and concise critiques of an article that outline why it is significant (or why not) and what the errors in its methods are. A good review will provide the authors with concrete comments that can be used to revise a paper and improve it.

There are other benefits of peer review. Reviewers become familiar with experts in their field who serve as editors, and more importantly, editors become familiar with them, both personally and as critical thinkers. If reviewers have a selected area of focus, evaluating new material in advance of publication enhances their knowledge of this area in an accelerated fashion. Even reviewing a topic that is not squarely in one's area of focus can be personally beneficial, as reviewers may broaden their understanding of their own area by finding unexpected links between it and the review area.

I would urge the early career psychiatrist to strongly consider serving as a peer reviewer. A good way to get started is to speak with senior faculty at your institution who frequently serve as peer reviewers and ask to assist in a review they are

doing. This initial process would allow you to write a draft review and have it critiqued by the faculty member. Alternatively, one could volunteer to do a review that the senior faculty member had planned on turning down and obtain feedback from the faculty member about this review prior to submitting it. In the rare, and much less ideal, event that this strategy is not feasible, directly offering your services to journal editors by contacting them and outlining your area of expertise and related publications you have in this area is another strategy that is reasonable to pursue. As an editor, I am most comfortable assigning a review to someone who has already published in an area, but they do not have to be an acknowledged expert. In any event, I urge early career psychiatrists to just say, "Yes!" to peer review.

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