

Pre-Publication Peer Review Process Entirely Misguided Warns Former Editor of the British Medical Journal

"It's time to slaughter the sacred cow."

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Widespread acceptance of pre-publication peer review as the “gold standard” of science-based research is entirely misguided, warns a former editor of the *British Medical Journal* (BMJ), one of the top scientific journals in the world.

Richard Smith, who served as the editor of BMJ between 1991 and 2004, has long been critical of the peer review process, which for all intents and purposes isn't really a science-based approach to keeping tabs on what gets published in science and medical journals.

“Most of what is published in journals is just plain wrong or nonsense,” says Smith, warning that there is no credible evidence to suggest that the peer review process is an effective method of detecting errors or ensuring that only sound science gets published in the world's leading journals.

Ideally, every paper submitted for peer review goes through rigorous examination by multiple experts within the appropriate field. The hope is that any errors or other anomalies will be identified through this process, resulting in only the highest quality material gaining an official stamp of approval prior to publication.

However, this isn't always the case, and an increasing number of journal editors are blowing the lid on this highly respected but unsubstantiated litmus test.

“If peer review was a drug it would never get on the market because we have lots of evidence of its adverse effects and don't have any evidence of its benefit,” contends Smith. “It's time to slaughter the sacred cow.”

Peer review is a failure and, ironically, it's more faith-based than science-based, says Smith

During a speech he recently gave at an event for the Royal Society, Smith explained how an experiment he helped conduct during his time at BMJ revealed that a striking number of intentional errors added to a test paper made it through the [peer review](#) process without being spotted.

A short paper containing eight deliberate errors was sent to 300 separate reviewers. Smith says that only a handful of these reviewers were able to spot any of the mistakes, and none of the reviewers spotted all eight. Shockingly, 60 of the reviewers spotted no mistakes at all.

“No one found more than five, the median was two, and 20 percent didn’t spot any,” Smith is quoted as saying by *Times Higher Education*.

At the same time, the peer [review](#) process also ends up fostering discriminatory sentiment against innovative research that challenges the status quo, including papers that question things like vaccine safety or the effectiveness of conventional cancer treatments like chemotherapy.

“The evidence, as opposed to the opinion, on prepublication peer review shows that its effectiveness has not been demonstrated and that it is slow, expensive, largely a lottery, poor at spotting error, biased, anti-innovatory ... prone to abuse, and unable to detect fraud,” wrote Smith in a 2011 posting at [BMJ Blogs](#).

“The global cost of peer review is \$1.9 billion, and it’s a faith based rather than evidence based process, which is hugely ironic when it’s at the heart of science.”

What passes as “science” today is really a cult of pet opinions pushing an agenda

Dr. Richard Horton, editor of the U.K.’s other top-leading journal *The Lancet*, appears to hold similar views concerning peer review. In a separate editorial of the same nature, Dr. Horton wrote that “[M]uch of the scientific literature, perhaps half, may simply be untrue.”

This, he contends, is due to factors such as small sample sizes, conflicts of interests among researchers, and “an obsession” among scientists to “pursue fashionable trends of dubious importance.”

“The apparent endemicity of bad research behavior is alarming,” he wrote. “In their quest for telling a compelling story, scientists too often sculpt their data to fit their preferred theory of the world.”

This is essentially the same warning that we’ve been giving our readers for years. There is an undeniably anti-science agenda afoot that has camouflaged as actual science and is pushing anti-science concepts such as “vaccines are safe and effective,” “GMOs are good for you!” and other pseudoscientific garbage as fact.

[As we reported last July](#), dozens of “scientific” papers were pulled from the *Journal of Vibration and Control* (JVC) after it was discovered that they were the product of a “peer review ring”, which means the reviewers were completely fabricated.

Around the same time, [another 120 papers were retracted from multiple journals](#) after a computer scientist came forward and confessed that they, too, were completely fraudulent.

“My conclusion is that we should scrap prepublication peer review and concentrate on postpublication peer review, which has always been the ‘real’ peer review in that it decides whether a study matters or not,” adds Smith.

“By postpublication peer review I do not mean the few published comments made on papers but rather the whole ‘market of ideas,’ which has many participants and processes and moves like an economic market to determine the value of a paper.”

Sources for this article include:

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<http://blogs.bmj.com>

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