What happens at The Lancet

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Gramado, Nov 2011
Thomas Wakley 1795 - 1862

- Surgeon in London
- Influenced by William Cobbett, a radical journalist, to change direction
- Founded *The Lancet* in 1823

To inform
To reform
To entertain
“a Lancet can be an arched window to let in the light or it can be a sharp surgical instrument to cut out the dross, and I intend to use it in both senses”

Thomas Wakley
The Lancet's sections

Blue - Comment, entertainment perspectives
Red - Research
Green - Review and opinion
Sections – ‘Blue’

– This week in medicine: 12 brief news pieces
  written in-house, decided on Thursday
– Editorials: 1 long, 2 short (clinical, public health, health policy)
  written in-house, decided on Thursday
– Comments: linked, unlinked
  most commissioned, rarely spontaneous
– World Report or Special Reports
  all commissioned, a group of trusted Science journalists worldwide

Sections – Blue... ctd

– Perspectives: book reviews, exhibitions, profiles, lifelines, The art of medicine...
  commissioned, sometimes written in-house
– Obituary
  commissioned
– Correspondence
  Selected by correspondence editor, should be submitted within two weeks of publication of paper they refer to.
  some stand alone correspondence letters, authors might be asked to respond
Sections - 'Red'

3 or 4 primary Research Articles

(Of about 4200 submitted papers, 88% rejected inhouse, 8% rejected after peer review, 4% accepted for publication)

Papers passed on to daughter journals (with agreement of authors)

Sections - Red .. ctd

FT papers: from submission to publication in 31 days, same rigorous peer review.

FT team: 2 London Editors, New York based Editor, Beijing based Editor

2010: 550 submitted, 110 reviewed, 49 published
**Sections - Red . . ctd**

RCTs: practice changing, important clinical evidence (about 50% of published research papers)

Need honest and full reporting (side effects, effect size...etc, primary outcome and secondary outcomes, we ask for protocol, truthful interpretation, no spin)

We actively seek out ongoing trials and make contact with PIs

**Sections - ‘Green’**

Seminar, Reviews, Series – largely commissioned

VPs, Hypotheses, Public Health, Health Policy.....

CRs (educational)
Theme issues

commissioned green section and call for research papers

Diabetes
Surgery
Respiratory Medicine
Cardiology
Stroke
Breast cancer
Malaria
Tuberculosis
9/11
.......etc

Series: global health

Global health:
obesity, vaccines, China, Japan, Brazil, South East Asia, India.....
Series: clinical

Plan: 12 per year

2011: stroke, pain, arthritides, heart failure, COPD, organ transplantation, breast cancer

Maybe linked to themed issue

Maybe linked to conference

Maybe in conjunction with *Lancet* daughter journal

Commissions

*The Lancet Commissions*

Health professionals for a new century: transforming education to strengthen health systems in an interdependent world


Executive summary

Prologue: statement

30 years ago, a series of words about the education of health professionals had been written: "The management of health care..." Such a statement is now considered old fashioned and unnecessary, and the words are not used today. However, many of the ideas contained in these words have been transformed into reality, not only in the developed world but also in the developing world. The Lancet is now publishing a series of articles on the education of health professionals, focusing on the current state of affairs and future needs. The aim of this series is to provide a comprehensive overview of the education of health professionals and to identify areas for improvement. The series will be published over the next few months, and will be available online at the Lancet's website.
How do we decide about research papers?

Editors’ first thoughts

- Readership
- Originality
- Topicality
- Truth

Paper triage
Editorial discussion meeting

Papers presented by handling Editor

Reviewers as advisors

Regular outside guests

Lively discussions

Democratic decisions (not always)
Preventing and Pursuing misconduct

- Screening for duplicate publication and plagiarism
- Not just rejection
- Due process: contact authors and institutions
- Ask for an institutional investigation
- Act on findings (correction, expression of concern, retraction)

Common difficulties for editors

- Time consuming!
- No reply from authors
- No reply from head of institutions
- Inadequate investigation by institution
- No institution
- Managing/analysing raw data
- What to do, if alleged misconduct is unproven
Screening for duplicate publication or plagiarism

Check
Let authors know we check (=prevention)
Act on allegations and findings

*Lancet* only checks Review material
We check before sending to peer reviewers
Treat it on a case by case basis
We rarely find plagiarism, but more often
text recycling or ‘patchwork writing’
Two examples of fraud: The case of John Sudbø

- Nested case-control study
- 454 cases (oral cancer): 454 controls
- NSAID use: Hazard ratio oral cancer = 0.47 (95% CI 0.37-0.60)
- NSAID use: Hazard ratio CV death = 2.06 (95% CI 1.34-3.18)

Two examples of fraud:
The case of John Sudbø

- January 13, 2006: the story broke
- A chance discovery:
The Ekbom Commission

Expression of concern: Jan 21, 2006
Retraction: February 4, 2006

- Swift, thorough, independent investigation
- Report published
- Lessons learnt
Case 2: The case of Hannes Strasser

- 42 women randomly assigned to injections of autologous myoblasts and 21 to collagen for stress urinary incontinence
- At 12 months, 38/42 completely continent vs 2/21 in controls

- paper published after peer review on June 30, 2007
- Lancet contacted by University’s Rector and members of ethics committee with concerns
- DoE published correcting CoIs, funding source, and affiliations of some authors Feb, 2008
- Lancet is being made aware of investigation by Government Body following a court case and a parliamentary question
- Expression of concern issued by Lancet May 3, 2008
• report by Austrian Government Agency for Health and Food Safety concludes in Aug, 2008

• serious irregularities in study conduct including consent procedure, data documentation, patient insurance….etc

• doubts as to whether study as described ever existed

Coauthors distance themselves from paper claiming only honorary authorship

Rector of University dismissed by University governing body for allegedly unrelated reasons

Paper retracted by Lancet on Sept 6, 2008
• Took a reasonably long time
• Report is subject to Austria’s officials’ Secret Act and not made public
• University reacts defensively
• ??whistleblower dismissed

Thank you for your attention

Questions????