

“Professional” or “full time” scientific editor: the need for the growing medical journal in Indonesia

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“Children dream of growing up to be doctors, lawyers, teachers, or firefighters—but some of them end up, quite happily, as editors” (Elizabeth Whalen)

The scientific journal, which are believed to be involved in the service business for the author, have to emphasize the author’s needs as a client. All authors expect an immediate response from the journal. In one of the Medical Journal of Indonesia (MJI)’s workshop, I asked the question how fast that the author wants to have a response from a peer review process, they are willing to have a peer review response as soon as possible i.e. in two weeks which is impossible to be fulfilled. However, one of the obstacles in running a scientific journal is a turnaround timescale including the responding time for the submitted article from the author.³ Every scientific journal should organize the fast peer review process, without reducing the quality of the review itself, for giving a fast-response to the author. This immediate process also give a benefit of getting a good article which will not be submitted to other journal. The scientific editor plays a central role in this stewarding peer review process.⁴ There are two distinct categories of scientific editor which are:

1. ‘academics-as-editors’: the editor are employed first and foremost as university academics, then this editorial work is an ‘add-on’ to their main duty;
2. ‘professional’ editors: the editor are employed as a full timer and do not hold academic posts in universities or other institution.³

The number and variety of scientific editors depend on the size of the journal, the frequency of publication, and the number of article submission. A small journal published a few times a year can be organized by a some part-time editors. In contrast, large journals can

have many and highly differentiated full-time editors.⁵ For example, in 1994, the New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM) has already employed 7 full time editors.⁶ These full time editors can be increasing now because NEJM always offers a new full timer editors positions. During Eight International Congress on Peer Review and Scientific Publication in 2017, I got an experience to have a discussion with one of full time editor in chief in one of international journal. He described the advantage and how the works of full time editor in chief in this journal.

There are many advantages of having full-time scientific editors. First, they will attend to manuscripts in a timely manner, not distracted by other duties. They have more focus to look at the peer review process. Second, full-time editors will have the better experience to deal with many manuscripts from different fields and know how the articles were evaluated by the reviewers. The experiences are in fact pooled, as all manuscripts are discussed among the editors. Furthermore, full-time editors usually have no or less potential conflict of interest in evaluating submitted manuscripts, even manuscripts from well-known scientists. It is due to the motivation of the full-time editor is to make the journal as successful as possible, which means the journal will get the excellent papers and a good reputation for reporting interesting and technically excellent science.⁷

In last 25 year, MJI had only two full time of administration (editor) staffs to organize all articles. These editorial staffs only supervised the moving of an article in peer review process without involved in the selection of reviewer and

the scientific issues. After MJI included in SCOPUS indexing, MJI has received least 300 submission articles in the last 6 months. Even though MJI has already increased the selection criteria for submitted articles, there are still large number of articles should be organized into peer review process. MJI realized that these condition cannot be done by these staffs. Furthermore all of MJI's scientific editors are part time editors which have another duty or position in their faculty or institution.

To anticipate this condition, starting last year, MJI has decided to contract a full time scientific editors as assistant editors to manage the peer review process. These assistant editors do not only supervise the moving of the article in peer review process, but they also have an independency to select the reviewer and involve to evaluate the scientific issues in the article. According to International consensus (including World Association of Medical Editors (WAME) and Asia Pacific Association of Medical Journal Editors (APAME)), the scientific editor should have one of core competency which is the editor had a knowledge of the field(s) covered by the journal.⁸ Thus the selection of these (young) assistant editors based on their education background which should be match to article category in MJI. For example, clinical research assistant editor should be a medical doctor and basic research editor should have a background of basic science education. For early learning process, these assistant editor are supervised by seniors (part time) editors to run the peer review process. These assistant editors will learn about

our process and quality of peer review process. Based on my personal experience, these full time scientific editors have shortened the peer review process time. It is hoped that this is a one of cornerstone for MJI to be more professional and involved in scientific business with the main goal is to get a good quality articles by giving a fast response to the authors submitting the article.

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