

HOW TO PEER REVIEW A RESEARCH ARTICLE

Nurse researchers and expert clinicians have an important role as peer reviewers.

By Kai Tiaki Nursing Research
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NZNO's annual research journal, *Kai Tiaki Nursing Research*, publishes research relevant to New Zealand nursing practice, education and management. Sharing the findings of research is important for the continuing development of professional knowledge and to provide best evidence for nursing practice. It is also important for both emerging and established researchers to have the opportunity to contribute to dialogue about professional issues and practice development in nursing. Nurse researchers and expert clinicians have an important role to play in acting as peer reviewers in the publication process, particularly in evaluating the reliability, credibility and significance of research for the journal. Acting as a peer reviewer enables researchers and clinicians to contribute to the profession's body of knowledge, to help authors get published, and to further develop expertise in their own field of practice (Ali & Watson, 2016).

What is a peer review?

Kai Tiaki Nursing Research uses a blind peer-review process to establish the quality and relevance of research for its readership. The aim of peer review is to ensure the accuracy and quality of published research and literature through constructive peer critique (Nicholas & Gordon, 2011). Peer review enables articles submitted to *Kai Tiaki Nursing Research* to be evaluated by independent nurse researchers and clinical experts, who are associated with the particular research methodology and/or area of practice that is the focus for the submitted article. The researcher reviewers focus on the quality and rigour of the research process, while the clinicians evaluate the implications of the research as evidence for practice. The peer reviews help the editor assess the suitability and relevance for publication in the New Zealand context. Like most international nursing journals, *Kai Tiaki Nursing Research* uses a double-blinded peer review process, where neither the author nor the reviewers know the identity or institutional affiliations of the other (Ali & Watson, 2016). Peer reviewers are selected by



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the journal editor according to prior research on the topic and publication record, and/or level of expertise within their area of practice. Clinicians are likely to be either nurse practitioners or master's-prepared clinical nurse specialists.

The peer reviewer role

The peer reviewer role is an important academic and professional activity for nurses working in academic and advanced clinical roles. The role of the reviewer is to act as a "consultant" to the journal and to provide feedback to authors about ways to

improve the presentation of their manuscript (Lovejoy, Revenson & France, 2011). Peer reviewing enhances reviewers' knowledge about research and the publication process and requires them to develop important analytical and relational skills to provide constructive and accessible feedback to authors (Ali & Watson, 2016). It also enables reviewers to critique their own writing and presentation style in developing research articles, review best practice for clinical articles, and contribute to the profession as a member of their academic or clinical community (Pierson, 2015).

Professional responsibilities in peer review

There are particular requirements that peer reviewers need to consider in undertaking review (Nicholas & Gordon, 2011). The Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) Council (2017) ethical guidelines for peer review identify key responsibilities for reviewers:

- Agree to only review manuscripts that are within your area of expertise, and declaring a conflict of interest where this occurs, given that New Zealand is a relatively small nursing community.
- Ensure timely responses and return of reviews and only agree to review when you know you can fit it into your workload.
- Respect confidentiality in the review process and avoid using information obtained through the review process for any other purpose.
- Engage in careful reading and interpretation of the manuscript, and if you are not clear about the scope of the article or submission requirements for the journal, check with the editor.
- Provide unbiased, constructive and objective written feedback that is accessible and helpful to the author for further development of the manuscript.
- Ensure that the ethical requirements for the conduct of research have been identified within the manuscript.

Peer review process

Kai Tiaki Nursing Research uses a checklist with criteria that guide the reviewer in evaluating the scope, presentation, methodological rigour and suitability of manuscripts for publication. Publishers generally suggest that a critical reading of a manuscript has at least two stages – first an overall read-through for “readability” and to establish whether or not the topic fits within your area of expertise. A second read-through enables closer attention to the detail of the manuscript, where the reviewer may find it helpful to skim through other published research on the topic to ascertain how the manuscript fits within this field (Nicholas & Gordon, 2011; Pierson, 2015). The review checklist requests feedback on the overall content of the manuscript, and general presentation and logical flow of ideas, including referencing. The review of the research approach requires

feedback on: whether the title fits the focus for the research, the research aims, review of the literature and presentation of research methods or design, including ethical requirements. Consistency throughout the research process, and reliability or validity and contextualisation of findings within the professional or clinical context for practice are also evaluated. Paying particular attention to the accuracy and relevance of tables or diagrams is also important, particularly in terms of what they add to or clarify in the manuscript (Lovejoy et al, 2011). Lastly, the checklist requires reviewers to evaluate whether the manuscript is suitable for publication in the journal or requires amendments. It is also worth noting whether the research makes a significant or innovative contribution to the research field or area of practice.

Giving written feedback

Including some well-focused written feedback is invaluable to authors, particularly in qualifying how the reviewer has evaluated the manuscript. Constructive, detailed feedback can show authors how to edit and re-craft elements of the manuscript into a more suitable form for publication. This can include identifying relevant references that would enhance the quality of the research (Lovejoy et al, 2011). The COPE Council (2017) guidelines reiterate the importance of commenting on the quality and rigour of the manuscript, and that it is important not to ask the author to extend the work beyond its current scope; any additional support that is needed to strengthen presentation of the research should be clearly identified. Written feedback to authors should be a key component of reviews, with comments numbered so that authors can refer to specific points when resubmitting the manuscript.

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