

## Medical Journals and the Popular Media

International Committee of  
Medical Journal Editors

The public's interest in news of medical research has led the popular media to compete vigorously to get information about research as soon as possible. Researchers and institutions sometimes encourage the reporting of research in the popular media before full publication in a scientific journal by holding a press conference or giving interviews.

The public is entitled to important medical information without unreasonable delay, and editors have a responsibility to play their part in this process. Doctors, however, need to have reports available in full detail before they can advise their patients about the reports' conclusions. In addition, media reports of scientific research before the work has been peer reviewed and fully published may lead to the dissemination of inaccurate or premature conclusions.

Editors may find the following recommendations useful as they seek to establish policies on these issues.

1. Editors can foster the orderly transmission of medical information from researchers, through peer-reviewed journals, to the public. This can be accomplished by an agreement with authors that they will not publicize their work while their manuscript is under consideration or awaiting publication and an agreement with the media that they will not

release stories before publication in the journal, in return for which the journal will cooperate with them in preparing accurate stories (*see* below).

2. Very little medical research has such clear and urgently important clinical implications for the public's health that the news must be released before full publication in a journal. In such exceptional circumstances, however, appropriate authorities responsible for public health should make the decision and should be responsible for the advance dissemination of information to physicians and the media. If the author and the appropriate authorities wish to have a manuscript considered by a particular journal, the editor should be consulted before any public release. If editors accept the need for immediate release, they should waive their policies limiting prepublication publicity.

3. Policies designed to limit prepublication publicity should not apply to accounts in the media of presentations at scientific meetings or to the abstracts from these meetings (*see* Redundant or Duplicate Publication). Researchers who present their work at a scientific meeting should feel free to discuss their presentations with reporters, but they should be discouraged from offering more detail about their study than was presented in their talk.

4. When an article is soon to be published, editors may wish to help the media prepare accurate reports by providing news releases, answering questions, supplying advance copies of the journal, or referring reporters to the appropriate experts. This assistance should be contingent on the media's cooperation in timing their release of stories to coincide with the publication of the article.

*Inquires and comments should be sent to The Editor at the São Paulo Medical Journal (Revista Paulista de Medicina) secretariat office, Associação Paulista de Medicina, Rua Brigadeiro Luís Antônio, 278, 7th floor. 01318-901  
Phone: +55 11 232 3141, extension 210; fax: +55 11 3107 7979; e-mail: revistas@apm.org.br*

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