



How quickly does *CMAJ* evaluate submissions?

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The impact of original research depends partly on the timeliness of its publication. To improve the impact of *CMAJ* we are intent on reducing the interval between manuscript receipt and publication.¹ As a first step we audited the manuscripts processed by *CMAJ* from January to April 1999 to determine the proportion of original research articles and related submissions that were selected for peer review and the time taken to make a first editorial decision on these manuscripts once peer review was complete.

Between January and April 1999 *CMAJ* processed 568 manuscripts. Of these, 157 (28%) were original research and other scientific articles considered for peer review. Of the remainder, 77 (14%) were solicited editorials and special supplements, 109 (19%) were letters to the editor and 225 (40%) were articles such as news items, features and book reviews; of these categories, only special supplements are typically peer reviewed.

Of the 157 original research and other scientific articles in the first category, 36 (23%) were rejected without peer review on the basis of the independent assessments of two *CMAJ* editors. Usually papers are rejected for reasons relating to relevance, appeal to the *CMAJ* readership, methodology and originality. The mean time taken to come to the decision to reject without peer review was 15 days, and by 4 weeks a decision to reject had been made for 32 (89%) of these papers.

Peer review assessments were solicited for the remaining 121 (77%) original research and other scientific manuscripts. As a rule we require at least 2 peer reviews before a manuscript is advanced to the weekly editors' meeting, where 6 editors decide to accept, reject, or request a revision for the paper. An editorial decision was made on 65 (54%) of these manuscripts by 8 weeks from the date of submission and on

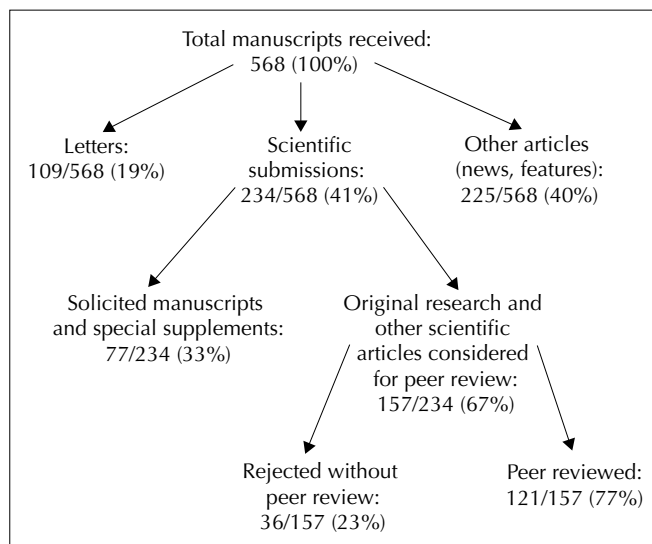


Fig 1: *CMAJ* manuscripts received in January–April 1999.

112 (93%) by 12 weeks. The mean time to first editorial decision for articles that were peer reviewed was 59 days.

Without analogous rates from other medical journals, it is difficult to interpret these results. From data published by *BMJ*² we calculated that they made a decision on 75% of submitted manuscripts within 8 weeks. At *CMAJ*, we made a decision on 64% of submitted manuscripts ([36 + 65]/157) within 8 weeks. Such comparisons are not particularly meaningful, however, because the circumstances and policies that affect manuscript processing vary across journals. For instance, *BMJ* receives a larger volume of manuscripts than *CMAJ* but rejects a higher proportion without peer review (67% in July–December 1997).

The results of this baseline audit will become more meaningful as we continue to track and report our performance at *CMAJ*. In the interim we shall strive to reduce the interval between manuscript receipt and publication as one means of improving the impact of the journal and the research it publishes.

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References

1. Joseph KS, Hoey J. Research letters in *CMAJ* [editorial]. *CMAJ* 1999;160(6):825.
2. The editor. *BMJ* data. *BMJ* 1998;316:1519-20.

Table 1: Time to first editorial decision on original research articles and other manuscripts considered for peer review by *CMAJ* (January–April 1999)

Time to decision	No. (and %) of manuscripts	
	Rejected without peer review <i>n</i> = 36	Peer reviewed <i>n</i> = 121
Within 4 weeks (24 days)	32 (89%)	0
Within 8 weeks (56 days)	36 (100%)	65 (54%)
Within 12 weeks (84 days)	36 (100%)	112 (93%)

Note: The mean time to first editorial decision was 15 days for articles rejected without peer review and 59 days for articles that were peer reviewed.