
Peer Review Information and Acknowledgments

The contributed, peer-reviewed presentation section of the Association of Chiropractic Colleges Educational Conference–Research Agenda Conference (ACC-RAC) is now celebrating its 15th year, and each year we improve our processes resulting in a better and better conference. Since the early development of the Association of Chiropractic Colleges' peer review process for the annual Educational Conference, the ACC Peer Review Committee has provided the same unbiased, double-blinded, peer review process for submissions to this conference. All submissions are reviewed in the same unbiased manner through the process of blinded peer review. Therefore, any one submission does not receive preferential treatment over another, nor are submissions singled out for rejection, for reasons such as author name or affiliation. It is important that submitters and attendees understand that the "contributed" presentations at this conference are not invited; instead they go through a peer-reviewed selection process.

Here is a review of the peer review process for the contributed sessions. Authors receive the call for papers for the conference as published in the JCE, through the website, various forms of e-mail, or the chiropractic institutions. The author follows the instructions to prepare the submission and sends the completed package to the Peer Review Chair. Prior to processing for review, the submission is screened for completeness and compliance with the submissions requirements. Those that pass through the initial screening are then blinded and given a submission number so that the submission can be identified, but not by author or institution.

The submission is then reviewed for content so that it can be matched to reviewers. Although the

author(s) are required to include the submission's major topic areas in their submission form, the submission is also reviewed for additional topic areas that the authors may not have included. The submission is then matched to a minimum of five different reviewers from the ACC Peer Review Committee based on topic areas, range of experience, and affiliation. Each peer reviewer submits his or her areas of expertise and provides information on the amount of publication and peer review experience. Over the years, many reviewers have established an outstanding track record with the review committee, and each year new peer reviewers, both experienced and novice, are accepted to volunteer for the committee.

Some reviewers are asked to review manuscripts that cover only a portion of their content area, since not all reviewers can be experts in all topic areas. For example, one reviewer may be an expert on randomized controlled trials, another a specialist in geriatrics, and another an expert on spinal adjusting technique, but each may be assigned to review a controlled trial on spinal manipulation of a geriatric population.

When a submission is assigned for review, not only is it matched to topic and expertise, it is also matched with reviewers who are not associated with the institution of the submission authors to help with reducing bias. The complement of reviewers must also come from a variety of other institutions (eg, all reviewers assigned to one manuscript should not come from the same location). All peer reviewers are blinded to one another, as well as the authors and the authors' institution as best as possible.

The peer reviewers are provided instructions for review, evaluate the submissions using structured forms, and submit their ratings and comments back to the Peer Review Chair. Reviews are tallied for rating numbers and the comments are compiled. Any problems with ethical or scientific issues that were not originally identified on initial screening are brought up to the Peer Review Board for further discussion and decision. Rating numbers are only one component to determine whether a submission is accepted for presentation. Comments from reviewers provide additional basis from which to determine whether a submission should or should not be presented. Reviewer comments are also reviewed for appropriateness. Some comments may be followed by comments from the Peer Review Chair, which may add insight or correction, and are noted in parentheses and italic font. Any paper that does not comply with basic ethical or scientific standards, regardless of high rating scores, is not accepted for presentation.

The reviewers' ratings and comments provide constructive feedback to the authors and suggest ways in which particular submissions need to be strengthened. Authors whose submissions are accepted can use these comments to improve their work prior to presentation and publication. For authors whose submissions were not accepted, they are encouraged to make corrections, if these are possible, and then resubmit for the following year. Once all authors have been notified, reviewers are e-mailed all ratings and comments for the papers they reviewed. This provides insight for reviewers into the other reviewer critiques of the submissions and improves the peer review process overall.

As with any procedure that involves humans and decision-making processes, peer review is not perfect. Authors or reviewers may disagree with some of the decisions made by the review committee and sometimes their reasons may be justified. Also, some submissions may only receive a "fair" rating, but by the time of the conference the author has incorporated the constructive criticisms from the peer reviewers and the presentation is far better than the one originally submitted. This would make it appear as if the review process was flawed, when in reality, the process was actually a success. In addition, not all flaws are identified and not all pearls are praised either. However, the overall process using a combination of blinded reviewers has produced an excellent product over the years.

Some conference attendees ask why platform sessions have a mixture of paper topics or that sometimes the papers in a set of presentations seem to be unrelated. This is because of the wide variety of topics that are submitted to the conference; therefore, the range of topics of accepted papers is also broad. Because the Peer Review Committee focuses on quality of presentations and not quotas, sometimes a paper is accepted for presentation but stands alone in its topic area. This poses a challenge for placement in the program. However, the Peer Review Committee is dedicated to the presentation of the work and is more interested with the presentation of a quality paper than if it fits neatly into a topic area. This is why there is a wide variety of topics and the number of platform and poster presentations will vary from year to year. Also, the platform schedule for contributed papers has a definite time limit; therefore, we must limit the number of platform presentations that are accepted.

The goals for the Peer Review Committee are formidable and we periodically review how close we are to reaching them. The long-range goals of the ACC Peer Review Committee include:

1. Maintain the scholarship of the presentations and integrity of the conference;
2. Increase quality of conference presentations;
3. Increase number of published papers as a result of the conference;
4. Increase number of experienced peer reviewers;
5. Provide scholarship opportunities for new peer reviewers; and
6. Provide mentorship and feedback to peer reviewers and authors.

The ACC 2008 Peer Review Committee succeeded in doing an excellent job. These people are commended for their contribution to the continued improvement of this conference. We would like to thank the following people who provided peer review for the 2008 conference:

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If you are interested in becoming a peer reviewer for this conference, please fill out and submit your application (found at www.chirocolleges.org). It would be wonderful to have you on the team.

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