

Support for Reporting Guidelines in Surgical Journals Needs Improvement: A Systematic Review

Authors : Riaz A. Agha, Ishani Barai, Shivanchan Rajmohan, Seon Lee, Mohammed O. Anwar, Alex J. Fowler, Dennis P. Orgill, Douglas G. Altman

Abstract : Introduction: Medical knowledge is growing fast. Evidence-based medicine works best if the evidence is reported well. Past studies have shown reporting quality to be lacking in the field of surgery. Reporting guidelines are an important tool for authors to optimize the reporting of their research. The objective of this study was to analyse the frequency and strength of recommendation for such reporting guidelines within surgical journals. Methods: A systematic review of the 198 journals within the Journal Citation Report 2014 (surgery category) published by Thomson Reuters was undertaken. The online guide for authors for each journal was screened by two independent groups and results were compared. Data regarding the presence and strength of recommendation to use reporting guidelines was extracted. Results: 193 journals were included (as five appeared twice having changed their name). These had a median impact factor of 1.526 (range 0.047 to 8.327), with a median of 145 articles published per journal (range 29-659), with 34,036 articles published in total over the two-year window 2012-2013. The majority (62%) of surgical journals made no mention of reporting guidelines within their guidelines for authors. Of the journals (38%) that did mention them, only 14% (10/73) required the use of all relevant reporting guidelines. The most frequently mentioned reporting guideline was CONSORT (46 journals). Conclusion: The mention of reporting guidelines within the guide for authors of surgical journals needs improvement. Authors, reviewers and editors should work to ensure that research is reported in line with the relevant reporting guidelines. Journals should consider hard-wiring adherence to them. This will allow peer-reviewers to focus on what is present, not what is missing, raising the level of scholarly discourse between authors and the scientific community and reducing frustration amongst readers.

Keywords : CONSORT, guide for authors, PRISMA, reporting guidelines, journal impact factor, citation analysis

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