

SMJ Editorial Fellowship:

A Firsthand Experience of Editorial Decision-Making

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In the past year as a *Singapore Medical Journal (SMJ)* Editorial Fellow, I have had the opportunity to peer review submissions, participate in *SMJ* editorial meetings where publication decisions are made, pen an editorial titled “Chronic Kidney Disease is no longer a ‘nontraditional’ cardiac risk factor: a call to action for Cardio-Kidney-Metabolic Health”, and write a guide to the peer review process. Even as a junior specialist, I had a front-row seat to witness journal editorial decision-making and a chance to participate in the process and contribute to decisions made. I also gained access to a longitudinal mentor during the fellowship, who has been a great source of wisdom and inspiration.

Having now been on the other end of submitting papers to journals and waiting with bated breath to see if my article would be accepted, I better understand the many – and sometimes opposing – factors that go into an editorial decision whether to accept or reject a submission. Beyond principles of evidence-based medicine, such as the presence of a well-framed hypothesis, appropriate study methodology, mitigation of potential biases, and accurate and fair result analysis, the journal must also consider questions of novelty, impact on the scientific field, and in the case of *SMJ*, implications for the local healthcare landscape and policy-making. A good peer review and editorial process not

only selects appropriate articles worth publishing, but also provides constructive feedback that improves the final published product.

I have also come to realise that it is in the interest of our medical community and research ecosystem to have a strong local journal, which improves the standing and visibility of local research, amplifies the impact of local and regional work, and flies the Singapore flag high. A journal is defined by the articles it is able to attract and chooses to publish. While metrics such as impact factor are important, this singular statistic oversimplifies many complex nuances and is not to be blindly worshipped. Behind any journal is a committed team of section editors and reviewers with diverse areas of expertise – all of whom receive no remuneration apart from the shared vision of contributing to the journal, and more broadly to medical progress and ultimately our patients.

As the 2026 Editorial Fellowship applications open, I encourage senior residents and junior specialists who desire to gain insights into the peer review and editorial processes to apply. A basic grasp of evidence-based medicine and/or experience with simple research will be helpful, and a dose of intellectual curiosity is essential. The expected time commitment includes approximately one hour-long meeting a month, plus a peer review about every other month, which should be manageable for

busy clinicians (except perhaps senior residents taking their exit examinations in the same year, whom I would advise to focus on studying first). I trust that it will be an enriching and meaningful journey, just as it has been for me. ♦

Scan the QR code to learn more about the *SMJ* Editorial Fellowship.



Dr Fong is a renal physician at Sengkang General Hospital with clinical interests in peritoneal dialysis, glomerulonephritis and tubules/electrolytes. He is also heavily involved in medical education and has authored two books, *Algorithms in Differential Diagnosis* and *A Strategy to and Worked Practices for the MRCP PACES*.

