

October 10, 2018

Dear Potential Contributor to *BMJ Quality & Safety*,

After about 7 years of replying to the near daily inquiries we receive asking about potential submissions to the journal, we have decided to stop responding to such queries. This letter explains why and provides reassurance on the main subjects of these queries.

First, the volume of inquiries does add substantially to the work of overseeing the journal. One inquiry a day may not sound like much, but responding to each one and reviewing the materials they contain—article outlines, abstracts or full manuscripts—adds significantly to the work of handling the multiple formal submissions we receive every day at the journal.

For years, we put up with this additional work in the spirit of being as helpful to potential contributors to the journal as we try to be to authors of formally submitted manuscripts. We noted, however, that we could seldom say anything useful in our responses. Sometimes we could reply that a manuscript clearly fell outside our scope of interest at the journal. Very occasionally, we could reply with enthusiastic interest in the proposed manuscript. But, in the vast majority of cases, we could say only something to the effect of: 'This manuscript falls within scope for us and you are welcome to submit it so we can formally review it.'

So, if you are inclined to submit your manuscript to *BMJ Quality & Safety*, we suggest that you simply follow through on that inclination. We provide a rapid review, with a mean time to decision of 20 days and a median of 11 (i.e., 50% of all submissions have a decision within 11 days).

We appreciate that some inquiries, rather than asking about the suitability of a topic or manuscript, involve a question of article type, not our overall interest in the content. "Should I submit this as Original Research or an 'Improvement Report? Or, "Should I pitch this as a submission to 'The Problem with...' series or just a regular Viewpoint?" Rest assured that we will never reject a paper or review it unfavorably because of the wrong choice of article type. We will review the manuscript's content on its merits. If the content seems promising but the editors (or reviewers) think it would work better reformatted as a different article type, we will simply say so in the decision letter. In other words, any change to the article type can occur during the revision process.

Previously, we had encouraged inquiries for potential submissions of two types: narrative reviews and submissions to the series called "The Problem with..." Instructions/advice for both of these specific submission types appear below.

Sincerely,

Kaveh G Shojania, MD and Mary Dixon-Woods FAcSS FMedSci FRCP
Co-Editors-in-chief, *BMJ Quality & Safety*

Narrative reviews: We previously had recommended to authors that they contact us before writing any narrative reviews. We made that recommendation wanting to protect authors from wasting their time. We wanted to avoid having authors prepare a paper for BMJQS which, if it did not work out with us, might have no other likely home. We found, however, that many authors submitted reviews without ever contacting us. And, many of those who did had already written the manuscript anyway. In terms of the problem of manuscripts on topics unlikely to work out at other journals, we recommend that authors not write such reviews. We will never be able to guarantee acceptance of an uninvited manuscript. So, writing a paper with few other target journals represents a risky undertaking for authors.

We currently receive 1600 papers a year and have space to publish only 10-15% of these submissions. In that context, no matter how promising a paper may sound or look, we cannot do better than adjust this probability upwards to something like a 50% chance of eventual success. The only way to more accurately estimate the chance of eventual acceptance is to in fact review the manuscript, hence our advice to simply to submit the review through the journal's website.

'The Problem with...': This series covers widely known topics, tools or concepts that are also commonly misunderstood or misapplied. The launch [editorial](#) describes the idea behind the series and provides examples. Past articles in the series include:

1. Anhoj J, Hellesoe AB. The problem with red, amber, green: the need to avoid distraction by random variation in organisational performance measures. <https://qualitysafety.bmj.com/content/26/1/81.long>
2. Card AJ. The problem with '5 whys'. BMJ quality & safety. 2017;26(8):671-7. <https://qualitysafety.bmj.com/content/26/8/671.long>
3. Macrae C. The problem with incident reporting. <https://qualitysafety.bmj.com/content/25/2/71.long>
4. Peerally MF, Carr S, Waring J, Dixon-Woods M. The problem with root cause analysis. <https://qualitysafety.bmj.com/content/26/5/417.long>
5. Reed JE, Card AJ. The problem with Plan-Do-Study-Act cycles. <https://qualitysafety.bmj.com/content/25/3/147.long>

We previously had recommended to authors that they contact us before writing any potential manuscript for this series in order to vet the topic. We wanted to avoid having authors prepare a paper which, if it did not work out with us, might have no other likely home. However, for the majority of suggested topics, even if they do not quite work for this series, they could work as a Viewpoint. So, if you are unsure if your topic fits this series, simply submit it as a viewpoint and just mention in your cover letter that you had wondered about its suitability for 'The problem with...' series. We will never reject or review unfavourably any manuscript simply because it might have been better pitched as a different article type. If a Viewpoint receives favourable reviews but we think it would work better for 'The problem with' series, we will simply say so in a decision letter inviting revision.