POTENTIAL BARRIERS FOR JOURNALS ATTEMPTING TO IMPLEMENT A REPORTING GUIDELINE POLICY

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Headache’s policy

- Headache adopted mandatory adherence to multiple reporting guideline criteria
  - 45% of journals endorsing CONSORT = mandatory
  - Only 25% of CONSORT endorsers required upload of completed checklist with submission
  - Endorsed 7 guidelines plus 2 created by Headache
  - 63% of CONSORT endorsers adopted additional guidelines

- Stated goal was to provide authors and reviewers with the tools to ensure we offered uniformly better reporting standards
## Potential Barriers to Launching a Reporting Standards Policy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barrier</th>
<th>Potential Solution</th>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of awareness of problem – no enthusiasm to take problem seriously</td>
<td>Gather evidence; circulate studies on positive effects of reporting guidelines; highlight transparency issues</td>
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<td>Burdensome task for authors</td>
<td>Reinforce benefits (via instructions and editorials) for authors</td>
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<td>Fear of being first in smaller fields</td>
<td>Do advantages of policy implementation outweigh risks – evident improvement in reporting quality may encourage submissions; collaborate with other titles</td>
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<td>Thought-leaders in field believe they suitably address reporting issues and problem is overblown</td>
<td>Present evidence of scale of problem, undertake analysis of random sample of manuscripts</td>
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<td>Mandatory enforcement perceived as excessive – consultation is a softer approach</td>
<td>Outline how checklist can be used during manuscript composition and by reviewers during evaluation</td>
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<td>Confounder</td>
<td>Potential Solution</td>
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<td>Authors have no prior experience of reporting guidelines – acute problem for small, lower ranked journals</td>
<td>Provide educational resources; work with next generation of authors; ensure editorial staff can address questions</td>
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<td>Large number of authors with no prior record of submission to journal – confused by policy</td>
<td>Provide clear instructions (both in the Instructions for Authors and submission system); provide training resources for authors</td>
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<td>Language barriers</td>
<td>Translated guidelines help; journals may need to provide translated instructions</td>
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<td>Incomplete checklists</td>
<td>If resources exist, consider strong enforcement, especially at revision submission.</td>
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<td>Incorrect reporting guideline use</td>
<td>Ensure consistent enforcement – ask authors to supply correct checklist</td>
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<tr>
<td>No application of reporting criteria to manuscript</td>
<td>Enforcement; explain reporting standards policy is not about completing checklist</td>
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Authors that Fail to Adhere

- 12% of submissions failed to include checklist
- 62% of submitting authors of manuscripts without reporting checklist were first time authors to *Headache*
  - Typically 47% of authors have no prior submission history with *Headache*
- 81% of papers without checklists are from non-English speaking countries
- 78% of papers without checklists were rejected after peer review
Editorial Board Adoption

- 80% of editorial board (n=15) use completed checklist to inform their decision
  - “I check because it is a strong predictor of quality”
- 53% felt reviewers used the checklist
- 93% felt the quality of methodological reporting had improved since policy implementation
- Only 46% had used a checklist outside of submitting to *Headache*

Comments:
- *Authors may understand concepts but not the purpose of checklist*
- “afterthought” – not considered during article composition
Has the *Headache Reporting Guideline* Policy Achieved its Goals?

- We will soon have 4 years of data and intend to conduct several analyses to measure impact.
- One simple, but interesting, analysis revealed the proportion of RCTs that mention the trial design in the title is increasing.
Overcoming Barriers

- Better inform Editors and editorial offices of scale of problem; instigate discussion and seek universal adoption
  - Work with publishers
  - Disseminate widely a toolkit for journals with advice on measuring scale of problem
  - Encourage grassroots collaboration between journals
- Empower journals to take ownership of their own quality processes
  - Provide education and training resources for Authors, Reviewers, office staff and Editors