

POTENTIAL BARRIERS FOR JOURNALS ATTEMPTING TO IMPLEMENT A REPORTING GUIDELINE POLICY

Jason Roberts, PhD

Tim Houle, PhD

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

Barrier	Potential Solution
Lack of awareness of problem – no enthusiasm to take problem seriously	Gather evidence; circulate studies on positive effects of reporting guidelines; highlight transparency issues
Burdensome task for authors	Reinforce benefits (via instructions and editorials) for authors
Fear of being first in smaller fields	Do advantages of policy implementation outweigh risks – evident improvement in reporting quality may encourage submissions; collaborate with other titles
Thought-leaders in field believe <i>they</i> suitably address reporting issues and problem is overblown	Present evidence of scale of problem, undertake analysis of random sample of manuscripts
Mandatory enforcement perceived as excessive – consultation is a softer approach	Outline how checklist can be used during manuscript composition and by reviewers during evaluation

Other Confounders to Launching a Reporting Standards Policy

Confounder	Potential Solution
Authors have no prior experience of reporting guidelines – acute problem for small, lower ranked journals	Provide educational resources; work with next generation of authors; ensure editorial staff can address questions
Large number of authors with no prior record of submission to journal – confused by policy	Provide clear instructions (both in the Instructions for Authors and submission system); provide training resources for authors
Language barriers	Translated guidelines help; journals may need to provide translated instructions
Incomplete checklists	If resources exist, consider strong enforcement, especially at revision submission.
Incorrect reporting guideline use	Ensure consistent enforcement – ask authors to supply correct checklist
No application of reporting criteria to manuscript	Enforcement; explain reporting standards policy is not about completing checklist

Authors that Fail to Adhere

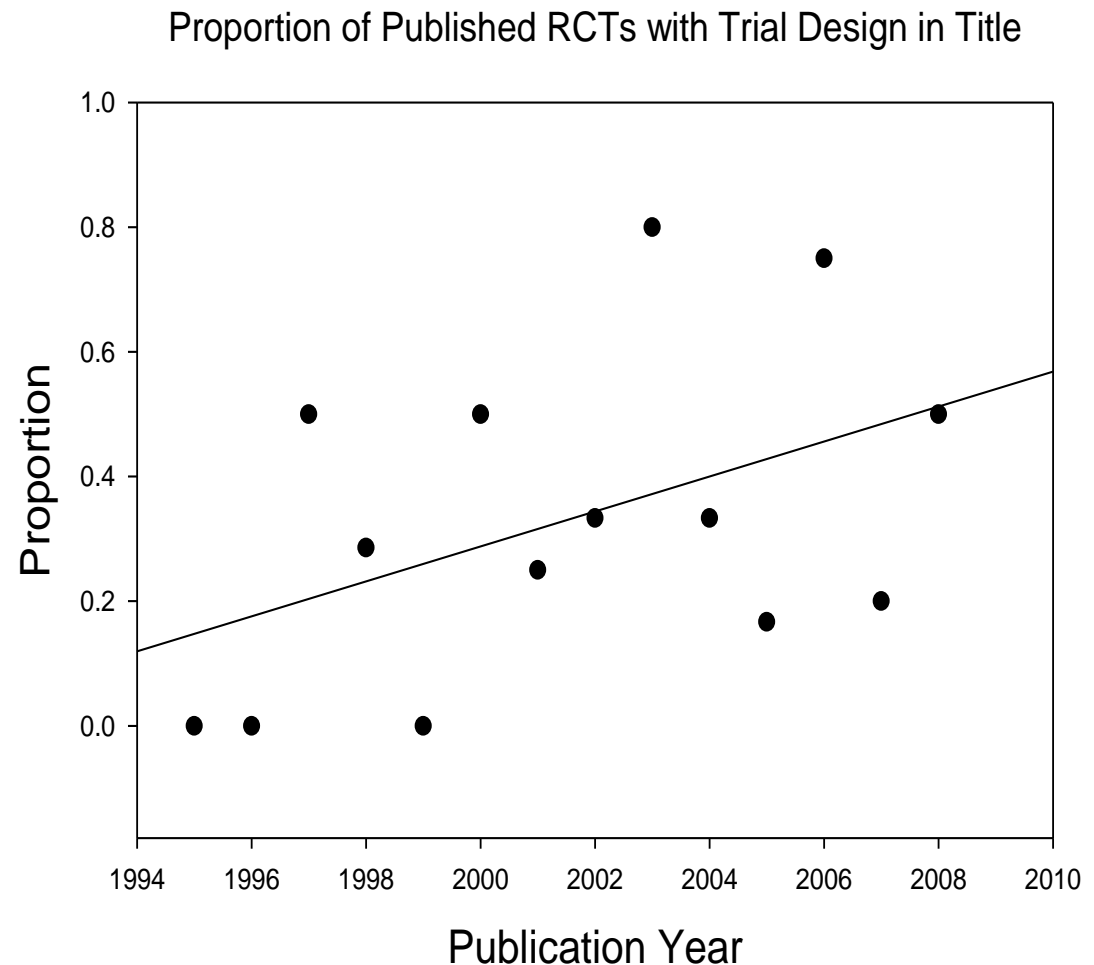
- 12% of submissions failed to include checklist
- 62% of submitting authors of manuscripts without reporting checklist were first time authors to *Headache*
 - Typically 47% of authors have no prior submission history with *Headache*
- 81% of papers without checklists are from non-English speaking countries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