

## Dear Reviewers,

Thank you very much for your willingness to support the *ZFA – Zeitschrift für Allgemeinmedizin* in the scientific evaluation of submitted manuscripts. Some perhaps helpful information on the review process in the ZFA is listed in the following. Knowledge of the procedure is particularly important for reviewers as well as for authors. However, the task of the reviewers refers exclusively to points 4 and 7.

### Workflow of the submission procedure

1. An author submits a paper to the Editorial Manager (EM) of the ZFA: [www.editorialmanager.com/zfa/](http://www.editorialmanager.com/zfa/)
2. The managing editor of the ZFA (Michael M. Kochen) is informed about the submission, reads the paper and informs the four co-editors. After reading the text (electronically in the EM), all editors vote with a simple majority whether or not the article should be submitted to the external *peer review* process or not. The editors of the ZFA are not allowed to conduct reviews themselves.
3. If the paper is to be reviewed, the managing editor invites 2–3, almost always primary care colleagues, to the peer review from a database with over 100 addresses. The timeframe proposed to the reviewers for an expert opinion is 10 days. Like other journals too, the ZFA has made the experience that long timeframes do not make it easier for the reviewers, but tend to lead to a permanent postponement of the task. We can, of course, extend the period upon request.
4. The reviewers review the paper (see below for detailed instructions).
5. After receipt of the expert opinions, the managing editor decides whether the paper must be revised, accepted without changes or rejected and informs the authors. In this process, the reviews are pro-

vided in full or in excerpts. We ask the reviewers for their understanding if the lead editor occasionally changes the linguistic (not the content) style of the review during this transmission of information.

6. Authors are requested to resubmit the revision electronically within six weeks. To facilitate the work of reviewers, the following are obligatory for revisions
  - a so-called *cover letter* (detailed point-by-point answer to the comments/suggestions of the reviewers) and
  - highlighting of the changed text parts in colour.

Without these parts, a review cannot be accepted for further processing.

7. After receipt of the revised paper, the reviewers will again receive the texts – with the question as to whether the proposed amendments have been properly taken into account.

8. On the basis of the responses of the reviewers, but also with regard to his own evaluation, the managing editor decides whether the paper is accepted for publication or whether further changes are necessary and informs the authors and the reviewers.

9. Like almost all reputable biomedical journals worldwide, we do not conduct double-blind or double-open review procedures\*. The authors of the manuscript are not anonymous, but you as a reviewer are vis-a-vis the authors.

### Suggestions for reviewing

After carefully reading the text, please write something fundamental about the value of the paper in the first two or three sentences – e.g. good/bad, current, urgent problem, innovative, outdated, nothing new, good practical relevance, etc. Afterwards, please review the (usually, but not always structured) chapters chronologically and name what you consider to be good and bad, i.e. parts worthy of cor-

rection. If possible, please also inform the authors which text details should be changed.

- **Summary/Abstract:** has the specified structure been adhered to? Has the content of the text been reproduced adequately? Intelligibility? Is the quality of the English language in the abstract appropriate?
- **Introduction:** adequate brevity? Sufficient justification for the paper?
- **Methodology:** sufficient details? Comprehensible and understandable for the average reader? Objectives/hypotheses clearly formulated?
- **Results:** clearly comprehensible presentation? Logical sequence? All results in *this* section and not spread over other chapters?
- **Discussion:** are the *main results* repeated concisely in the first sentences of this chapter? Are the results discussed or is there speculation about other facts? Is the hypothesis addressed? Are the strengths and weaknesses of the paper listed?
- **Literature:** have the formal rules been observed (see p. 2 of the instructions for authors of the ZFA, <http://www.online-zfa.de/page/147?> Number of quotations necessary, but not excessive?
- **Tables/Illustrations:** principle of text saving through tables/illustrations adhered to (no double representations text plus illustration/table!)?

Please also take the opportunity to evaluate the *quality of the language used* (simple and understandable for the readers of the ZFA, i.e. reader-friendly) and tell the authors where they can make improvements.

However, it is not necessary to correct **formalities** such as grammatical or comma errors. We would like to spare you this effort. Please try to support the authors (your colleagues) in their efforts to publish in the ZFA. A critique in the form of a concrete, well-meaning hint is much more helpful than a snide or even derogatory remark. Many reviewers are also active as authors and should ask

\* Whether authors and reviewers are open or concealed has no significant influence on the quality of a paper according to scientific investigations. In a personally fairly limited field such as general medicine (almost everyone in academia knows almost everyone), however, the disclosure of reviewers could have considerable disadvantages for colleagues.

themselves which formulations they would find supportive when drafting the review.

Following the freely formulated expert opinion text, the system then asks you for:

A formal assessment (according to *school grades 1–5*) in the following categories:

- Value of the paper (e.g. relevance, applicability, topicality) for the ZFA readers,
- originality (e.g. data from own research, hypothesis-forming initial work),
- methodology (incl. statistics),
- language/formulations (reader-friendliness), graphic representation incl.

abstract and adherence to the ZFA instructions for authors,

- quality, topicality and format of the literature,
- overall quality of the paper and a final recommendation for the editors (tick one of five options),
- accept unchanged,
- publish in abbreviated form,
- revise marginally,
- revise considerably,
- reject.

### Additional comments

During the review phase, you will receive various automated messages from the

system that appear quite formal. Although they all bear the signature of the managing editor, they are *not personally formulated* – in contrast to the first letter. We appreciate your understanding of these automated processes.

If you wish to send a message to the managing editor, please use the e-mail address: [mkochen@gwdg.de](mailto:mkochen@gwdg.de).

With best thanks again for your effort and cordial greetings

**Prof. Dr. med. Michael M. Kochen, MPH, FRCGP**

on behalf of all editors and the publisher of the ZFA – Zeitschrift für Allgemeinmedizin