Editorial

Advancing the Adoption of Integrative Medicine: A Quick Guide to Publishing Research in *Integrative Medicine International*

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Key Words

Eastern and Western medicine · Guidelines for authors · Integrative medicine · Manuscript submission process · Traditional medicine · Complementary and alternative medicine · Scientific evidence

Abstract

Researchers and clinicians in integrative medicine (IM) are well aware that the research and reporting methods they use should be as scientifically rigorous as those used in conventional medicine. To establish the scientific evidence needed to promote the further adoption of traditional medicine (TM) and complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) into healthcare systems worldwide, it is important that doctors of IM publish their findings in English. The English-language, cross-disciplinary journal *Integrative Medicine International* aims to publish such work, by focusing on reporting 'new methods in [TM/CAM] research and therapy to complement and extend the methods of Western medicine'. The journal acts as a portal for the latest innovations, developments, trends, opinions, and achievements in TM. The purpose of this editorial is to encourage and support authors across a wide range of disciplines to report their research and clinical findings in IM. The article starts by explaining the process of preparing a suitable manuscript for the journal and then describes the general process of manuscript preparation, peer review, and publication that is common to many international journals. Some advices are also given to authors who are nonnative speakers to help them submit manuscripts of sufficient quality of English for review and in accordance with ethical publishing standards.

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Introduction

Recognition of the importance of traditional medicine (TM), including traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), is increasing worldwide. The 2008 Beijing Declaration issued by the World Health Organization's inaugural Congress on Traditional Medicine has been instrumental in gaining wider international recognition and in calling for governments to 'integrat[e] traditional medicine into their national health systems' [1]. However, there are still varying degrees of recognition and adoption, mainly due to the lack of rigorous scientific evidence of the efficacy of TM [2, 3].

Any research into TM is intrinsically integrative research, and most doctors of TM or complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) are doctors of integrative medicine (IM). Therefore, to establish the rigorous scientific evidence needed for TM, it is important that doctors of IM worldwide report their research and clinical findings not only in their local language, but also in English.

The English-language journal *Integrative Medicine International* is a portal for the latest innovations, developments, trends, opinions, and achievements in TM. It aims to 'publish new methods in [TM/CAM] research and therapy to complement and extend the methods of Western medicine'. Targeted at a cross-disciplinary readership, it accepts papers at the interface of basic, applied, and clinical research, on a comprehensive range of diseases and conditions (e.g., from neurological to anxiety disorders), and on a broad range of therapies (e.g., from nutrition and gene therapy to transdermal patches and laser acupuncture).

One of the present authors (W.P.) in his role as coeditor-in-chief of *Integrative Medicine International* would like to invite all clinicians working in TM, CAM, and IM to submit papers to the journal, and thus contribute to building the scientific evidence that is needed to extend the adoption of IM into Western evidence-based medicine further.

This editorial summarizes simply and clearly how doctors of IM can prepare manuscripts for the journal. For those who are not familiar with publishing in international journals, the general process of manuscript preparation, peer review, and publication is summarized. Some advices are also given to authors who are nonnative speakers of English to help them submit manuscripts of sufficient quality of English for review and in accordance with ethical publishing standards.

Why Publish in *Integrative Medicine International*?

When choosing where to submit their research findings, authors must weigh up the benefits that each journal offers. These factors typically include the journal's scope, readership, impact factor and other journal metrics, speed of decision-making, expertise of the editorial board and peer reviewers, and copyright terms. In its efforts to advance IM worldwide, *Integrative Medicine International* offers a wide range of benefits to both authors and readers (table 1).

How to Write for *Integrative Medicine International*

This section explains the main steps in preparing, submitting, and publishing an article. Authors should, of course, refer to the journal's Guidelines for Authors available on the journal website (<https://www.karger.com/Journal/Guidelines/261486>) for full instructions and explanations. The entire process is summarized in figure 1.

Table 1. Main benefits of publishing in *Integrative Medicine International*

Benefit	Details
Global reach	The journal is cross-disciplinary, it has a worldwide audience, and its editorial board members are experts from across the globe; it is published online only, and articles are published open access (under the CC BY-NC-ND license; free to readers) in order to attract a large and broad readership
Value to readers	The journal publishes a broad range of article types designed to be valuable to clinicians and researchers (original articles, case reports, clinical experiences, interviews, and review articles); its aims and scopes are broad in order to promote cross-disciplinary understanding of TM, CAM, and conventional medicine and to bring together research from the perspectives of Eastern and Western medicine
Quick editorial decisions	Initial decisions on manuscript suitability (editorial review) are made within 3 weeks
High-quality publications	Manuscripts undergo rigorous peer review; accepted articles are copyedited; color images are accepted
Advantages for authors	Each published article receives a DOI (a unique 'digital object identifier' for the document); self-archiving of the final published article is allowed, meaning authors can post the final copyedited version on their website or in other data repositories, offering further ways for readers to access the research findings

Fig. 1. Flow diagram of the process from manuscript preparation to publication for *Integrative Medicine International*, which is common to many international journals.

Preparing to Write

- 1 Write out the following components of the article's key message: (i) the clinical or research problem investigated (e.g., a key difficulty in treating a specific disease); (ii) how and why IM was expected to help; (iii) how IM helped or did not help (e.g., positive or negative findings), and (iv) the innovative nature and practical implications of the research findings (e.g., the key advantages of IM over general medicine and the novelty of the finding). Authors should keep referring back to their key message when writing, so the focus of the article is maintained throughout. Note that the journal editors and guest editors will pay particular attention to points (ii) and (iv).

- 2 Select the article type: decide whether the key message will be conveyed best as an original article, case report, clinical experience, interview, or review article. See the Guidelines for Authors for details.
- 3 Check compliance with ethical standards: confirm that the standard ethical principles of conducting animal and human research were complied with. Also, confirm the other ethics statements and documents required for submission (conflicts of interest, research funding, no duplicate submission or previous publication, etc.) because these are important for evaluation of the submitted manuscript.

Writing

- 1 Follow the journal's guidelines on (i) structuring the manuscript and (ii) formatting it (e.g., using page and line numbering). Following these standard guidelines helps the journal editor and peer reviewers to evaluate and comment on the manuscript easily.
- 2 Authors who are not confident about their English writing abilities can take these approaches to avoid delays in the manuscript evaluation and review process:
 - i Write in their first language if it is not English and then have it translated into English professionally by someone knowledgeable about IM. Ask colleagues about reputable translators or translation agencies, or check the publisher's website for examples, to be sure to receive a good quality manuscript that is accurately translated and of sufficient English quality for native and nonnative peer reviewers to understand and evaluate.
 - ii Write directly in English, paying attention to general principles of good academic writing (see table 2 for examples), and have the manuscript edited by a colleague who has good English skills or by a professional language editor familiar with the field. Again, ask colleagues to introduce reputable language editors or agencies, or check the publisher's website for examples. For authors interested in improving their medical writing skills, there are some good tips and study modules available online, and there may be some workshops on medical writing being held locally.

Submitting

The manuscript and accompanying files should be submitted using our online submission system, which can be accessed via the Guidelines for Authors. Authors should follow the steps shown to ensure they provide the necessary information and upload the manuscript and other files.

A cover letter is required to accompany the manuscript. The cover letter has two main purposes: to highlight the relevance of the research or case (e.g., the key message) and to provide information the journal requires (e.g., disclosure of previous publication in whole or part, suggestions for potential reviewers, and permissions obtained to reproduce figures or tables from previous publications). For *Integrative Medicine International*, the cover letter should include the following information: (i) the type of article that is being submitted; (ii) a statement confirming that all conflicts of interest statements are given in the Acknowledgements section of the manuscript, and (iii) a statement that the work has not been previously published, is not being considered for publication elsewhere, and that all authors have approved the submission.

Peer Review Process

If the paper passes the first editorial review, where the journal editor or guest editor judges the manuscript to be suitable for the journal, the manuscript is usually sent to 2 or 3 reviewers (also known as 'referees') for peer review. There are various kinds of peer review systems. The single-blind and double-blind systems are most commonly used in medicine. *Integrative Medicine International* operates a single-blind peer review system: the reviewers

Table 2. Some general principles of, and advices for, good academic writing

Principle/advice	Explanation
Decide a key message before starting to write	This will serve as a summary to keep the author, or group of authors, focused on the main message when writing
Create a standard structure for the manuscript	Readers expect a logically structured article: first, outline the research/clinical context of the work (background, aim and novelty of the study/case); what was done (methods); what was found (positive and negative results); and why the findings are important (discuss the implications/relevance and limitations/further work)
Follow the journal's Guidelines for Authors	To avoid delays in the manuscript evaluation process, be sure to format the manuscript correctly: pay attention to word/character counts, abstracts structure, reference counts, file formats, use of abbreviations, submission of figures and tables in the manuscript file or in separate files, and general formatting requirements (e.g., page and line numbers, line spacing, abstract subheadings)
Use short, simple sentences	Good academic writing is about expressing complicated ideas clearly and accurately, so use short simple English sentences
Spend time writing the abstract	The abstract is often the most read part of a research article, so it should summarize the main points clearly and concisely; it should not be composed of sentences copied from the main text but should be carefully crafted; it should not contain new information that is not given in the main manuscript
Use standard phrases to help logical flow	When reading the literature, authors can highlight standard phrases and use these in their own writing (e.g., 'Taken together, these findings suggest...', 'We speculated that...', and 'This study has some limitations.'). Note that such use does not constitute plagiarism because these are simply standard general phrases in academic writing that all authors use
Avoid plagiarism of ideas	Authors must cite the ideas/work of others clearly, to avoid giving the mistaken impression that the ideas are their own (plagiarism of ideas)
Avoid plagiarism of text	Avoid copying and pasting more than just simple standard phrases from other authors' work. Note that when copying and pasting, use quotation marks (see guideline 2 of reference [4]). Quoting is not that common in biomedical articles, so change the wording slightly by summarizing or paraphrasing accurately and always include the citation. Authors who are worried about using copied and pasted text can check their paper using antiplagiarism detection software such as iThenticate or ask a specialist translation/editing agency for advice and support
Provide correct citations (references)	Incorrect referencing gives a poor impression and, at worst, can mislead the reader. To manage all the references collected over time, authors should consider using reference management software, such as EndNote, to ensure they record full details of references. Such software also formats the references in common styles, which saves authors time in manuscript preparation
Provide stand-alone table captions and figure legends	'Stand-alone' means that the text can be understood on its own, without the reader referring to the main text. Readers should be able to read these 'titles' and immediately understand the table or figure. Therefore, carefully prepare figure keys, scale bars, and labels and table footnotes (including abbreviations)
Provide all required ethics statements and accompanying documents upon submission	Some ethics statements must be given in the Methods section (e.g., informed consent, ethics committee approval, and the research followed the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki). Other ethics statements often appear at the end of the main text (before the Reference section) or in the cover letter, or sometimes in both. Be sure to provide all the statements necessary (on funding, conflicts of interest, author contributions, etc.). If unsure about whether to declare a potential conflicts of interest, declare it. Some journals require copyright statements upon submission, others upon acceptance

‘see’ the author names, but the authors do ‘not see’ the reviewer names. The journal editors ensure that the peer review system is fair and rigorous, and that it provides constructive feedback to help authors publish high-quality research papers and ultimately contribute to advancements in IM.

Peer review can be summarized as follows:

- 1 After carefully reviewing the manuscript, reviewers send their comments and recommendations (reject, major revision, minor revision, or accept) to the editor.
- 2 The editor considers the reviewers’ comments and decides whether the manuscript is accepted, rejected, or requires some revision. The editor then informs the authors of the decision and encloses the reviewers’ comments.
- 3 After evaluating the comments, the authors must decide whether to revise their paper in accordance with the reviewers’ comments. Note that rejected papers should not be resubmitted to the journal, but submitted elsewhere. In addition, if a deadline for answering the comments is given, authors should finish revising the manuscript within the time stated (or request an extension of the deadline if absolutely necessary). Also, authors should write a detailed ‘response letter’ explaining their answers or comments for each reviewer and how they revised the manuscript. If they disagree with any comments, then they should explain why. Both the revised paper and the response letter should be uploaded via the online submission system.
- 4 The manuscript undergoes editorial review again. The editor may decide to accept the paper based on the changes made or to send it to the reviewers for a second review.
- 5 The editor will make another decision about the manuscript based on the reviewer comments. Manuscripts are often accepted at this stage, but some may go through further rounds of peer review to ensure they meet the standards of the journal for publication.

During the revision stage(s), the authors may need support from a specialist translator or native English-speaking language editor to ensure that the journal editor and reviewers can easily understand the revised areas of text and the response letter.

Publishing

Once a manuscript has been accepted for publication, depending on the journal, it may or may not be copyedited to meet the publisher’s style. All manuscripts accepted by *Integrative Medicine International* are copyedited to provide high-quality publications. Authors receive the copyedited article before publication and they have 48 h to check the final paper carefully and note any minor final changes before publication. This process is known as checking the page proofs (or proofs, galley proofs, or galleys). Once the authors have returned the page proofs, the article is prepared for online publication.

There are many steps in the publishing process that happen behind the scenes (96 steps, in fact, in the latest published list [5]), but one of the main ones that happens next is that the publisher assigns the accepted article a unique digital object identifier (known commonly by its abbreviation ‘DOI’). The DOI provides a permanent link to the article’s location on the internet.

Authors publishing in *Integrative Medicine International* are permitted by the publisher to self-archive their paper. Not all publishers allow this. Self-archiving allows authors to post the final published version of their paper on their own website, institution’s website, and in other data repositories as long as three simple conditions are met: the open access article must follow the terms of the Creative Commons license (CC BY-NC-ND), it must have a link to the final version on the publisher’s website, and it must include an exact statement given in the Guidelines for Authors.

Summary

Most peer-reviewed journals focus on modern Western medicine, and their journal editors and reviewers are often not so familiar with TM, CAM, or IM. This makes it harder for doctors in IM to publish their findings to a wide audience. *Integrative Medicine International* is, as the journal's slogan says, 'an intersection for conventional and alternative medicine.' It aims to give a wider voice to researchers and clinicians in IM by publishing high-quality, evidence-based articles in English, to reach a broad international audience.

Through this article, it is hoped that authors will submit their work to the journal and contribute to promoting the many benefits of IM to an international cross-disciplinary audience. The editorial office is happy to answer questions about manuscript preparation and publishing in the journal, and to respond to readers' interest in becoming a peer reviewer.

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