Letters to the Editor

Susanne Wiegand · J. Werner

Received: 10 December 2014 / Accepted: 15 December 2014 / Published online: 3 January 2015
© Springer-Verlag Berlin Heidelberg 2014

A letter to the editor is a letter sent to a journal about issues of concern from its readers. Usually, letters are intended for publication. In academic journals, letters to the editor are on the one hand open postpublication reviews of a paper; in most cases, critical of some aspects of the original paper. The authors of the original paper sometimes respond to these with a letter of their own. On the other hand, letters to the editor contain original research or information which is not sufficient for an original article.

First letters to the editor were published in newspapers by the mid-eighteenth century. The first letter to the editor which is registered in PubMed was published in *Science*, in 1884.

Why do people write a letter to the editor? One reason may be that it has a good chance of getting printed since the letter to the editor section is the reader's forum. Another reason may be that it is easy to write. A letter to the editor should be short and in many journals, there are no standards or guidelines how to prepare it. Several journals have some guidelines but they are often not very specific. Letters to the editor in the *New England Journal of Medicine* in reference to a Journal article must not exceed 175 words and must be received within 3 weeks after publication of the article. *The Lancet* welcomes correspondence on content published in *The Lancet*. Letters for publication in the print journal must reach them within 2 weeks of publication of the original item and should be

no longer than 250 words. Readers must realize that in many journals letters have not been peer reviewed, and therefore sometimes do not have high scientific impact and can be subjected to be misused. Therefore, editors have responsibility regarding it.

But what is the role of the letter to the editor? O'Rourke et al. try to analyze this in the current issue. They evaluated letters to the editor published in four different ENT journals in 2012 regarding their role, themes and authors. Spodick and Goldberg [1] examined in 1983 that in four specialized journals, only 2 % of the space was devoted for letters of the readers. Bhopal and Tonks [2] concluded that letters as a form of peer review are supported by editors but remain underdeveloped and underestimated by clinicians and many journals. To our knowledge, the article by O'Rourke et al. is the first article in which letters to the editor in ENT journals were examined.

References

1. Spodick DH, Goldberg RJ (1983) The editor's correspondence: analysis of patterns appearing in selected specialty and general journals. *Am J Cardiol* 52(10):1290–1292
2. Bhopal RS, Tonks A (1994) The role of letters in reviewing research. *BMJ* 308(6944):1582–1583

S. Wiegand (✉) · J. Werner
Department of Otolaryngology, University Hospital of Marburg,
Baldingerstr., 35043 Marburg, Germany
e-mail: swiegand@med.uni-marburg.de