



Medical education journal guidelines for educational quality improvement submissions

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BACKGROUND

- Quality improvement (QI) is a natural fit for many problems in medical education, as it allows for local, contextual changes to problems.
- There are currently fewer than a dozen published peer-reviewed articles applying QI methodologies in medical education.¹
- At the journal level, a lack of clear guidance for QI authors may serve as a barrier to publication.

HYPOTHESIS

Most medical education journals lack specific guidance for manuscripts using QI methodologies or encourage authors of empirical articles to use hypothesis-testing research methods.

METHODS

- Identified 23 core medical education journals using the MEJ-24.²
- Two independent raters reviewed the journal author guidelines for 23 journals, with disagreements resolved by a third author.
- Interrater reliability determined using kappa statistic (κ).
- Qualitative and quantitative data about the author guidelines were recorded.

RESULTS

- Quantitative study parameters included:
 - Explicit mention of QI methodology or QI projects (n=4, 17%, $\kappa=1.0$)
 - Specific reporting requirements for QI projects (n=1, $\kappa=0.5$)
 - Specific submission category for QI projects (n=1, $\kappa=0$)
 - Recommendations for quantitative data analysis (n=4, 17%, $\kappa=0$)

Table 1. Description of 5 journals that met study parameters

Journal Name	Description of QI Guidance Provided in Author Guidelines
<i>Advances in Health Sciences Education</i>	Referenced SQUIRE-EDU but made no other mention of QI. Presence of specific reporting requirements for quantitative data.
<i>Clinical Teacher</i>	Specific submission category for QI titled "Innovation, Implementation, Improvement." Author guidelines stated that submissions should contain explicit confirmation of ethical approval or IRB exemption but did not provide specific guidance for QI projects. No references to guidelines or checklists.
<i>Journal of Continuing Education in the Health Professions</i>	Suggested utilization of SQUIRE-EDU in the context of QI work receiving IRB exemption. Acknowledged the challenge of ethical approval for QI work but stated that conflicts of interest should still be investigated or addressed. Authors required to receive explicit approval or exemption prior to submission in three categories. Presence of specific reporting requirements for quantitative data.
<i>Journal of Graduate Medical Education</i>	Listed formatting and structure requirements for writing QI and Patient Safety articles, regardless of submission category. Provided a header of resources titled, "Qualitative Improvement, Patient Safety," which referenced SQUIRE-EDU, Wong's "Reporting on Patient Safety and Quality Improvement Education," and Wong and Sullivan's "How to write up your quality improvement initiatives for publication." Presence of specific reporting requirements for quantitative data.
<i>Education for Health</i>	No mention of QI. Presence of specific reporting requirements for quantitative data.

DISCUSSION

- Based on our review, few medical education journals mentioned QI at all.
- Almost none provided detailed guidance to authors of QI projects outside of citing the SQUIRE-EDU guidelines.
- Only one journal discussed ethical approval specific to QI projects.
- Lack of explicit mention of QI projects may leave authors confused about whether their QI submission would be accepted at all.
- Given the lack of guidance in writing and formatting QI articles, authors may perceive a preference of journals for quantitative data over qualitative explanations and contextual features.

CONCLUSION

- Few medical education journals currently provide guidance to authors of QI projects, which may serve as a barrier to their publication.
- We encourage journals to edit their author guidelines to provide explicit and specific guidance for QI projects.

REFERENCES

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