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Editorial Note on Opinion Articles

Akshay S Dinesh (Primary Care Physician)

Swathi SB (Primary Care Physician and Researcher)

Dr Sulaiman Sharieff (General Practitioner at Humanity Healthcare and Diagnostics, Tinfactory, Bengaluru)

What is the responsibility of an editorial team when it comes to opinion articles? Should any kind of opinion be allowed on our newsletter? Should we put disclaimers stating that we do not endorse opinions stated in such articles? Should we allow publication only opinions that the editorial team agrees with? Should we fact-check statements in such pieces?

The editorial team had an in-depth discussion of the above questions during the preparation of the current issue.

There are broadly two kinds of articles

1. Objective articles (eg: academic articles)
2. Subjective articles (eg: perspectives or opinion pieces)

Articles in the objective category are easy to verify. They are usually accompanied by various references and statements made are falsifiable. It is possible for an editorial team to verify facts and requests corrections on such articles.

But the articles in subjective category are not so straightforward. Disagreements on an opinion are hard to settle. Objectivity is difficult to attain when it comes to broad, ill-defined issues that are commonplace in real world.

Asking the author for citations on a subjective point would be infeasible. If there were citations they wouldn't be "subjective" at the first place. Also, it would deter submissions from those who aren't very vocal about their opinions. That is not what this place wants to

be. We want our newsletter to be a space for expression.

But what about opinions that are disagreeable? What about controversial or harmful positions which we do not want to endorse? Should we welcome them with caveats?

One idea that arose was that we could preface such articles with a disclaimer like this: "This is an opinion piece and the editorial policy is to give a platform for all opinions whether or not we agree. We do not endorse the ideas in this article." This could be suffixed with specific pointers to alternative ideas.

But this could be felt like we are infantilizing our readers. Should the editorial team not let the informed readers make decisions and opinions on their own? Why should we tell them what to think about an article?

Also this leads to antagonizing the author. Some might consider an outright rejection fairer than a publication with rejection written all over it. They lose the sense of ownership. They write for the readers and not for an editorial team to judge.

We do believe that an editorial team should have a stance of their own. But how do we express such a stance while avoiding the pitfalls mentioned above?

We arrived at a solution that resolves the conundrum, even though it may bring us more work.

In *The Emperor of All Maladies*, Dr Siddhartha Mukherjee tells the story of how the US media was required by their federal government to give equal airtime to antismoking messages if they are broadcasting cigarette commercials. This played a role in combating misinformation regarding smoking at that time and, among other things, led to decrease in consumption of smoking over the years.

Similarly, we plan to *balance* opinions with counterpoints that appear as separate articles. These could be invited articles, republished articles, or even articles written by a member of the editorial team. The fairness doctrine would be fulfilled. The editorial stance would not go unstated. And no opinion has to be rejected. Win for everyone.