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Publishing Strategies

Presentation - Publishing Strategies
Walter Pagel, Guillermina Lozano, Ph.D., Robert Chamberlain, Ph.D., Kelly Hunt, M.D.
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Walter Pagel, Guillermina Lozano, Ph.D., Robert Chamberlain, Ph.D., Kelly Hunt, M.D.
The University of Texas M. D. Anderson Cancer Center

Dr. Pagel:

Good afternoon to everyone here and in Science Park. Welcome. I'm Walter Pagel [phonetic] the Director of Scientific Publications. And on behalf of Scientific Publications and the Department of Faculty Development I’d like you, to welcome you to a panel discussion on publishing strategy. I'm very pleased to be working with this group of distinguished faculty, Robert Chamberlain, this gentleman here, is Professor of Epidemiology and Deputy Chair of the Department of Epidemiology, and he's director of the largest prevention oncology training program in the country called, Cancer Prevention and Teaching. He studies social risk factors in cancer, and new methods of recruitment and retention for prevention trials. Kelly Hunt is Professor of Surgical Oncology. She’s Associate Director of the Breast Center. She’s Section Chief of the Surgical Breast Center, Chairman of the Breast Committee of the American College of Surgeons Oncology Group, Breast Research Committee that helps direct Breast Cancer Research in the country, and she does research for clinical and basic research. And Guillermina Lasano is Professor of Molecular Genetics and Chief of a section of Cancer Genetics. She has graduated many scientists from her own laboratory, and is a leader in the field of P53 function and analysis of the P53 pathway using mouse models.

So what's all this fuss about strategy? We Willy Williams, I think that's his name, was the last, one of the last great hitters in American Baseball, and his strategy was to hit the ball where the fielders ain't. So he just said, hit'em where they ain't. That was his strategy. And you can bet that great soccer players that score lots of goals when they think about strategy they just say, well I kick the ball where the goalie ain't. What's the big deal? And James Watson after he published his, his DNA paper, he probably didn't have to think too hard about what journal would take his papers. I imagine he pretty much had his pick of the field. But for most of the rest of us strategy involves a careful balance of what our paper is able to accomplish, what kinds of journals are available to us, what sorts of audiences would be interested in our paper, what our career path looks like, and other various factors that are worth considering in order to devise a good publishing strategy. I've already passed, give, you all have handouts, or you should have handouts and there's some of you in back may not have them. But we can defiantly get you some, or you see the empty seats there is some there.

And I've emailed them to Mary Lou Findlay at Science Park for you to get them there. And it talks about just ordinary processes of the journal publication. And in there, there are opportunities for you to affect how well and how rapidly your paper gets published. Today though, this panel discussion is gonna talk mainly about choosing when and where to publish their articles. And at the end there'll be time for you to ask questions of the panelists. I want you to be sure, also, to fill out the evaluation forms when the discussion is over. So I want to start with something that's very interesting to me, and I hope to you, and that is choosing when to write. Most people probably think that you simply finish a, finish your work and then you publish it. But I think in many cases it's more complicated than that, and that there are questions of when are you finished, and when is the paper big enough to be worth publishing in the journal you want to publish it in? Would anyone here like to deal with that question? Doctor Chamberlain.

Dr. Chamberlain:

Well, I guess one of the driving forces in this decision is, When am I going to send my grant application? You know, if I need to publish one or two things on the topic from my previous research and have those at least submitted and in press, so that I can include that in my grant application. Those grant applications you’re going to drive the future research. And in fact that grant application preparation often forces me to keep up with the literature. So it's a great time to, to review what's going on in the field and find out what niche my paper, or what, what angle the paper should take. What should be the major variables? And I usually have a choice of variables. And so I may pursue something that's unique, or I may try to follow up another recently published journal article as well.

Dr. Lozano:

So I have a lot of graduate students in the lab. And when, when we discuss their work and are deciding when to publish, one of the first things I tell them to do is to put their figures together. And so when they start putting their figures together they start seeing a story. And then you can find the missing holes, because you can see the story developing. And you can say, well what's the next step? Or is there a section of this figure missing? And so I think it
does two things. It helps the student put a story together and make sure that the holes are all filled in. And I think it also gives you an idea of where the paper should go, you know, what journal you might be targeting it to. So I always find that if you can get your figures together and start thinking about a story that it helps you to finalize that story and, and move forward.

Dr. Hunt:

Yeah, I think those are both good strategies. One other thing that helps, I think, in clinical research is when you have a data set that you want to work with. Initially what is helpful, I think, sometimes for the residents and fellows that I've worked with, is to sit down at the beginning and write down what our questions are and what contribution we're hoping to make to the literature when we ask those questions. So we sort of set up a strategy from the very beginning, and that we're going to look at this question, and then we hope to publish a paper on this specific area, and then divide things into what you think are gaps in knowledge, you know, out there that can be filled. And so what contribution can we make specifically. And then sort of aim to doing your data assessment, analysis, and so forth with that in mind with your hypotheses and the question you want to answer. And really be writing the paper while you're doing that.

Now, of course, sometimes what happens is as you get through, half way through, or, or completing you data analysis then you realize that, you know, your hypothesis was wrong. And you have sort of a different thing to look at. But you still, you have, you understand what the gap in knowledge is in the literature and what you want to write. So for clinical projects I think its, it's really helpful to kind of have that strategy from the very beginning. And almost kind of write your paper as you're going along, rather than waiting till you finish your data analysis and then say, Okay, what data do I have, and what can I write? And so for clinical projects that's the strategy that, that I've used, and I think it's been very helpful. It's also helpful when your in a fellowship training program or a residency training program, because you know you only have a defined period of time in order to complete the work. And then I, I think that gives the trainees some guidance and so that they know when to, what to look forward to, when they need to kind of finish writing and completing data analysis and so forth.

For the laboratory projects I think it's a little bit different in that I would agree sometimes when you want to publish it's because you want to write a grant. And the people who are reviewing your grants want to see that you actually have some publications in that area before they're willing to take a risk and give you the money to, to do something. Recently I, I wrote a grant with someone that I started collaborating with and we thought it was a very good grant application; we both had publications in our area. One of the reviewers, though, came back and said well, these two haven't published together. And we hadn't even really considered that as, sort of, a necessary piece. But now in revising the application we're also putting together a manuscript that we're gonna have that, where we've published together to show that we actually can collaborate well together, and then can complete this project. So those are, are some of the things to consider.

Dr. Pagel:

So I, I could, I would be interested too in talking a little bit about fairly complicated research projects that can be divided into pieces or not. Depending on the kind of journal and the kind of impact you want to make. And I would be interested in knowing whether the existence of competitors as any affect on the decision about when you'll publish.

Dr. Lozano:

I think that's a very tough question. And, and I've dealt with it in my lab a lot, because I work on, on the P53 tumor suppressor. And as many of you know it's a very crowded field, and there's a lot of competition. And in fact, every one of my major studies has always been with the, back to back with the, with the competitor. And so there's a couple of things that come to my mind is number one, Who is doing the work? Is, it's usually more, if it's gonna be a big paper it's usually more than one person. Then you have to start thinking about these two individuals, Who's going to be first author of that paper? Who needs a first authored paper to go to the next step is one question? Who did the most work? Or if it's the same amount of work then you know, you've got both people in your office, and you're almost flipping a coin.

Because you really don't know who, you know, who's gonna be the first author of the paper when it's, when it's all together. But sometimes the journal that you target is also important. And so, even if you're second author on a paper and it's in Cell or Nature, that's much better than having, you know, these individual little papers. So there's, there's a lot of, of thought process that goes into that. I never make the decision alone. I always make it in collaboration with the people that are actually doing the work. So we discuss the projects. We discuss where the projects are going, if they can be melted into a bigger story or not. And how the individuals feel that a bigger paper versus two small papers would contribute to their research careers. I'm an established investigator, I don't need, you know, two papers versus one paper is not gonna to make any, any difference to me, but it does make a big difference to them.
Dr. Hunt:

Yeah, I think one interesting aspect of this whole publication thing is people sometimes forget about abstracts in terms of competitors. You know, a lot of times everyone wants to publish an abstract so that they can go to a meeting, you know, the American Association for Cancer Research, and American Society for Clinical Oncology. So people often kind of put their data together and publish an abstract and then say, well I'll write the paper later. But actually that is an area where all your competitors are actually reviewing abstracts, and are often on the committees that see the abstracts. And if you know that you have some very interesting data, and you have a competitor who's also working on that area, then probably the last thing you want to do is put out an abstract to a national meeting that they're gonna see. And then they're actually going to publish it before you.

So you really have to, to consider that in terms of disclosing your data and information. And I think that a lot of the considerations that Doctor Lasano just made are, are certainly important in terms of one paper versus two. But one thing you have to consider is that if you're trying to split something up into two papers, remember what, look at what journal you're sending it to. And sort of the quality and caliber of that journal. And realize that if you submit something that's missing sort of a, an important piece, because you want to put it in another paper, they're likely, the reviewers are likely to ask you for that piece of information. And therefore you're gonna have to resubmit, and it just lengthens the time that you have in order to get that publication out there.

So it's, it's always tempting to say, well let's get two papers out of this. But I think you have to consider whether the topics are so, sort of, interconnected that it, it's really gonna be a major question of the reviewers if you leave out that piece and try to get another paper at the same time.

Dr. Pagel:

As editors we sometimes see people attempting that, and they have unpublished data laced all the way through their results and discussion section. And that's, that's like, here's a red flag for reviewer, here's a red flag for reviewer. And the journals just aren't very happy to see you submit a paper where you've saving all your data for somebody else. So that's defiantly true. Do you have anything you want to say?

Dr. Chamberlain:

Well it's, of course, always the question of how thin you can slice the pepperoni. And in many cases editors encourage you to do this, because they have page limitations. And so that's again a factor that you want to consider when you choose a journal. If, if you have a fairly comprehensive paper, don't send it to a journal where you know the editor will only publish short articles. So that's, I think, another important consideration. On the point that Doctor Lasano mentioned about internal competition for data to publish papers, in my group typically this internal competition is among post-doctoral fellows and junior faculty. And it, it takes a lot of careful diplomacy for the principle investigator to identify the various papers and who is going to be first author. I developed for our group many years ago a, a paper proposal form, so that when a paper's first discussed the form can be filled out by the people in the office who are having the discussion. And they can list who the first authors going to be, and what the topic is, and maybe what the probable title might be.

What data set will be used, and which are the major variables. What journal it might be sent to, and when the first draft is due from the first author. And what the target date for sending to the journal will be. And all of this is often forgotten after months after the discussion is held. And that can cause a lot of argument and, and bad feelings among a group of people that have to work together on a daily basis. So I developed this form, which I encourage people to use. And, of course, it's a, it's always in flux, and you can update the form and put a new date on it, and circulate it around to the various authors. And some authors who haven't contributed anything will feel guilty, and say, please take my name off. And, and you get all sorts of, all sorts of reactions. But it, it is a mechanism that also helps protect post-doctoral fellows who leave the institution before the final paper is submitted. And I think this is an important, sort of, contract that you should consider as post-doctoral fellows, because you're contributing to some major work. And if the principle investigator agrees that you should have your name on the paper, and six months later you leave, the paper isn't quite finished, your name should not disappear. Assuming that your still participating in the manuscript as an editor or, or an author. So I, I mention that to you, because it's a fairly simple way to keep animosity at a minimum, and everything is on paper.

Dr. Pagel:

I'd like to put a plug in here both for Doctor Chamberlain for devising this form and for our departments writing workshops, which with his permission we use that form in our, when we help people learn how to collaborate with colleagues on their research and writing. I want to publicly thank Doctor Chamberlain.

Dr. Hunt:
I think that's a great idea. And actually that works within your own group. And, and that's something that we, we're sort of struggling in my group to try to, to get that more nailed down in terms of the exact form, and what the requirements are, and who needs to sign off on what in order to be a real contributor. But it, I think it also works with collaborators. And I actually know one of the scientists here at M.D. Anderson who told me that at the beginning of any collaboration that he has with another lab that they actually sit down and do this before the work gets started. And I think that's a fabulous idea. Because sometimes what happens is you set up a collaboration, you think it's a great idea and it's gonna be a real high impact paper, and then it turns out not to be.

It may still be a good publication, but not as high impact as you wanted. And what often happens is, you know, the names start switching around in, in terms of whether its a really high impact paper or whether it's a less, a, a lesser paper. And so if you establish at the beginning who's gonna be the first author, who's gonna be the corresponding author. Issues like that then the, and you have that all on paper, then at the end no one's going to have those hard feeling like they would if they wait until you realize that it's a really important paper versus a lesser paper. And that will preserve your collaboration and your ability to collaborate in the future. So I, I would encourage everybody to do that. I think that's just a great model to follow.

Dr. Lozano:

I just wanted to add in terms of basic research. It's sometimes difficult to, to finish the last bit of experiments, especially if the student is leaving and, you know, moving on to post-doctoral position in a different area. And I was having a lot of problems in the past with papers just sitting on my desk, because the student left or the post-doc left, and nobody wanted to take up the, the research. Because, you know, it's just gonna be a middle author, a middle author paper. And so one of my, and I, I tell this to all my students in post [unclear] before they even come into the lab. If they leave the lab then they leave a, a, a body of work that's not published, they leave first authorship on that paper. And that's the only way that I could get someone else to pick up the work and to finish those studies sometimes. So, it's just the philosophy, they know it, and most of them finish everything. They have it finished before they leave.

Dr. Chamberlain:

Right. And the important thing to that is that all of this discussion is up front. Before people invest their time in a collaboration.

Dr. Pagel:

I'm gonna skip a couple of questions on my list, you don't have it, and go to the one that says, How do you decide on the audience for your paper? So how do you decide between a very narrow specialist audience, and a broader audience? How do, how do you make those decision? And I'd just be glad to take it in order here if the question makes sense. Does it make sense? Yeah.

Dr. Lozano:

I usually shoot high first, and then when the reviewer says it should go to a specialized journal then it goes to a more specialized journal. I think it depends on the study and the complexity of the issues. And whether you think you're going to be able to hit a more general audience. It's a tough question, and I, I think my philosophy now is that you shoot for the highest quality journal that you think is appropriate for the study that you're doing. And, and just move forward from there.

Dr. Pagel:

So let, let me say something about what you, you just, Doctor Lasano just said. There's the, there's the, an implied relationship there between the impact of the journal and the size of its audience. So it tends to be that the high impact journals have the broadest possible audience. So when she, her first shot is at she thinks the most number of people are gonna be interested in this paper. I'm gonna write it for the most number of people, so that science or nature, or New England Journal of Medicine, or whatever will take it.

Dr. Hunt:

I would agree with that, shoot high first. But also, you know, some of the, the journals for some of the clinical research that I've done can take a very, very long time. And I do consider that. So if I know that I'm going to send it to a clinical journal and they're gonna take months to review it and come back with reviews and so forth. Then I will sometimes, you know, it depends. I sometimes change the journal, because I know I can get a quick review at another journal that has a similar impact, but maybe not as high. And sometime it depends on the, like you were saying before, if, if someone's leaving the institution and they're trying to finish this up. And I want them to be involved in the review process, and responding to the reviews and all that. Because I think that's an important part of
learning how to, how to publish papers. Then I will sometimes look at how long it's gonna take for the review. And, and look at the different journals, because of that issue. If we know that we have more time and it's an important question that we're trying to answer with our data, then definitely shoot high for a broader audience, and then work down from there depending on what kind of reviews you get.

Dr. Chamberlain:

Yeah, I agree that that, the turn around time on the journal is very important. And you can find this, find this out. They usually publish this annual in one of the issues of the journal. And often it's the last issue of the year. But put your, put yourself in the place of the reader of your article. You obviously know all about the field. What are your reading habits? I know my reading habits have changed over the years. When I started my career I subscribed to hard copy journals. And you know, I scanned the contents every, you know, the day it arrived. And I stayed on top of these two or three and it; it was before the electronic age. Today my strategies entirely different, I so lit searches on a regular basis. I have certain key words. And I look for the most recent things published. And I'll read them whether they're in a high impact journal or not. If it's, if it's a well described, a good title, and a good abstract I will spend the time to, to get the article and read it regardless of where it was published. But your, your knowledge of your field and your own reading habits may be the real clue to what strategy you want to use for your own publishing.

Dr. Pagel:

I'd like to recount a conversation by a post-doctoral, by a new assistant professor here at M.D. Anderson. Who in a, in a group of post-doctoral fellows was telling them that if he, if you don't have a paper from Science and Nature in your portfolio you can forget a job. And I would like to hear your comments about this. You can even forget an interview, he said.

Dr. Lozano:

Well I certainly didn't have any papers in Cell or Nature when I got my job here. I think they're wrong. I do think you have to have a good publication record. I do think you have to have in an area that you're interested in. I think more important is your, your research project. Where you want to go. What questions you want to ask. What hypotheses you want to address. Those may be very appropriate for positions in certain places where they're looking for people that have your area of expertise. I disagree that you need a paper in Cell or Science to get a job. But you need an evidence that you've done some good work, and that you have some good ideas to move forward with.

Dr. Hunt:

Yeah, I think, I don't think you need a paper in Science, Sal, or Nature, but it's nice. And I can tell you that I've seen applicants coming through for different positions who had one or two publications in those journals, and they were given significant consideration for a position. But when you see similar applicants in terms of training and so forth, who then have a very good productivity on their CV, whether it's in Science or Cell or whatever. That I think has, always is a very strong vote for that, for that applicant. So, and you cannot make a good argument for someone who has a good record of productivity. So, publishing in good journals, not necessarily Science or Nature and having a good stream of productivity I think is often more important than one or two papers in those, those very high impact journals.

Dr. Chamberlain:

I recently reviewed a CV of perhaps 20 publications. And after each one the applicant had put the citation index record. Because that's really where it is. You know? You assume that you publish in a high impact journal, you're gonna get a lot of, a lot of citations. That means other people are reading and using your work. That's not necessarily the case any longer. It was certainly the case early in my career, because people just subscribed to those top journals. But now it, I think personally it's, it's less important. And reading the CV I thought it was a very creative way to show everyone who read it just how important some of these articles were.

Dr. Lozano:

I guess I want to add to that, if you're in the lab of one of the big shots, and they're publishing regularly in, in Cell, Science or Nature. If you're a big shot it's easier to get your papers into those top journals. And so it's not necessarily the quality of the post-doc that did that work. And so, you know, if we see a CV and they've got, you know, a paper in Cell, it counts, but believe me that's not the whole story.

Dr. Pagel:

Well I'd like to turn to another topic for a short while, and then give you all a chance to ask some questions. I would like to talk a little bit, for you all to talk a little bit about rejections, how you respond to them. When do you contest them, if ever? What do you do when you disagree with the reviewer's comments? When do you decide, well the heck
She's never had a rejection, so that. I think, you know, actually I was just, I just had a meeting this morning with someone and we were going through grant reviews, which are similar I think in a lot of ways. And basically what we did was looked at each of the critiques and noted that basically the reviewers were pretty upbeat overall. They had some, they said there was some weaknesses and there were some areas, but overall the critique was pretty upbeat. And then we started looking at the specific questions that they proposed. And we said, well we can answer this. We can answer this. And basically when we got through with the critiques we realized that we could answer all of the questions in there with some pretty, pretty straightforward experiments or, and so forth.

And we said, yeah, we're definitely going to, you know, resubmit this. And I think it's the same way with a manuscript review, in that when you read the reviewers comments, when you see that in general they're pretty upbeat in the reviews, and that they're proposing that you look at a few variables here or there, or reanalyze the data. You know, look at one other western blot showing gene expression of, or is showing expression of some important protein that you had not looked at. I mean, if those are the things that you can do, and you can answer, then I think it's definitely worthwhile responding to that reviewer. And in, in my experience when you do that, you can get, you know, generally get acceptance.

It's when they are very, very critical, and when they start proposing that you do essentially two years of experiments in order to answer the questions that you need to be realistic. And that if you try to respond to it and say, well the reviewer is wrong, you know, they're, they didn't look at it correctly. Perhaps they didn't understand the data. Let me tell you again. That you're not gonna get an acceptance in that setting. So the hard part to me is when you get, say, two reviewers and one is very, very favorable, and one is very, very negative. And then I think, again, I try to look at what is it that they're asking for. What is it that they didn't like about it? Is it that something wasn't, wasn't explained well? And, and then we can just go through and with the help of our people in Scientific Publications, perhaps, you know that's, that's definitely a strategy I always use is to have them look at it and try to help understand, you know, how to explain things better. Because sometimes if you can just explain it better they understand what it is your point you're trying to make. But if you think that you can answer the questions that the reviewer has given to you, even if it was fairly negative review, then I think it's worthwhile. Because initiating a whole other review process with another journal can take a very long time. So that to me is the key, is to see can you answer the questions that they have overall, and especially if they sound pretty upbeat in terms of their review.

Dr. Chamberlain:

These, these rejection letters always come at the wrong time it seems. And I, I just close the office door and try to find words to describe the character of the reviewers in colorful terms. And then I put it in the drawer for a day. Then I come back and look at it and decide, essentially the points you've made, can I, can I fix it? The really unhappy kind of review is one where they've made errors, in fact. They've criticized things that, in fact, you've described that, that were in the paper. They said, you know, they don't describe the, the, the power of the sample, or whatever it might be. And you very clearly have. And you say, how could they have missed this? Go back and read it. Did I not describe it well enough so that one or two reviewers just entirely missed the point? And sometimes you can make those kinds of revisions and quickly get them back to the editor to the satisfaction of the reviewers, and, and get it done.

If additional work is, is needed, and you think that this paper has reached a conclusion; you might decide to send it some place else. This is very common in science, because often project never really finish. They just go from one grant sequence to another. And so there's not just some period where you just close the door and say, it's done, and this is the final. You just, you have to decide when you have enough to publish, will, will reach the conclusions about your hypothesis, or your research questions. And a, and find a journal that will, you'll be lucky enough to get an acceptance right away. But the turn around time is very important on resubmissions. And, you know, some editors are very good at getting it back to the original reviewers. Sometimes when there's a disagreement between reviewers the editor will have sent it to a tiebreaker, who doesn't know they're a tiebreaker, to do a separate review. And sometimes that's helpful.

Dr. Hunt:

I was just gonna say, one thing that I would discourage people from doing is, you know, I remember some of the first rejection letters that I got. And basically you look at it and you say, oh, the, the reviewers, they just didn't understand it. You know, it was, this is such important work and they just didn't get it. And actually it's, you know, and I hear people say that a lot. But actually it's the, the authors responsibility to make, you know, it understandable to the audience. And so, you know, that's where I, I, you know, I'm very serious when I say, you know, having someone else look at the paper and, and see what it is that you've left out. I mean, sometimes it's just a very simple fix for you...
to reword things and making sure that the reviewers do understand it. Because if the reviewers don't understand it and they're criticizing you for something, then, you know, your readership is not going to necessarily understand the impact of what you're publishing either.

So it's very important that when you get these types of reviews back that you don't just say, oh, you know, to heck with them; they don't know what they're talking about. But really, I mean sometimes people are just trying to keep you from publishing your work, cause they're competing with you. That does happen. And I've seen that before. And that's unfortunate. But sometimes they just really didn't understand it, because you didn't put it, put for in a way that's understandable. So take a step back for a minute, you know, close the door, say what you need to say and get it over with. And then ask someone to review it and see what, what piece is missing there that maybe someone could contribute, and then turn it around.

Dr. Lozano:
I just want to emphasize too, the things that, that have been said. And I agree with everything that's been said. And one is to have a cool down period. It's very helpful to just put it aside, sleep on it, and come back the next morning and then the emotions are gone, and you're much more logical about how you're going to approach the rebuttal. And then the second point is that, even if the reviewer is wrong you never say he or she is wrong. You always say, well, I probably didn't describe this as well as I could have and I've revised the text to describe it better. But you never say the reviewer is wrong.

Dr. Chamberlain:
Well often the kind of rejection letter that's most difficult to deal with is really a conditional acceptance. Where they place conditions that you, maybe you can't meet. One of those is often from the editor who says, cut this in half. You know, I, and, and that's often the writers fault, because you were too verbose. And I think early in my career I really wanted to tell the readers everything I knew. And it's not necessary. It's okay to give a brief background, but you don't need to write a dissertation about the topic. Your readers will know the background. So a few recent citations, a little bit of history, and that's enough. Very often you're, you're just so enthusiastic about getting your thoughts on paper that it's just too much.

Dr. Pagel:
I don't how many questions you have. Why don't we move to questions? I have some other issues in reserve in case you don't have many questions. But my experience often is that there are more questions than time in which to deal with them. So why don't we go there first. And I'd like to give Science Park the first shot at it if you all have a question that you'd like to address to the panel. Does anyone have a question in Science Park? I think not. Does anyone here have a question for the panel?

Audience:
It goes back to the rejection piece we were talking about.

Dr. Pagel:
Oh, wait. Stop! When you answer, when you say something please push the button on your mic in front of you and hold it down. Do you see it? No not that button, the button at the base. There's a rubber button at the base. If you hold that down then the people at Science Park and everybody here can hear you.

Audience:
I have a question about the rejection process. If you get a letter and like you were saying, maybe one review is very positive another is not, and they don't ask you to resubmit, do you, is it a good idea to go ahead and do some of the revisions and then resubmit to the same journal? Or go ahead and go with another journal?

Dr. Hunt:
Well in my experience I think it's always easier if it looks like you can answer the questions to resubmit to the same journal. But again, sometimes I think it, it'll, it depends on how negative that reviewer is. So if you have one reviewer that's very favorable, the second reviewer is luke warm, but you can answer their questions, I think it's always easier to do that, to resubmit there and save time. Because if you decide to submit to a whole other journal, the time frame to me is just usually not acceptable. And I would prefer to do that.

Dr. Chamberlain:
Actually the cover letter from the editor usually has the decision right up front. The editor has checked off on this form letter, we never want to see this again. Please, please read, you know, review the criticisms and determine, you
know, whether you can answer it. Or, or we accept conditionally, or we, we accept without reservation. And one of those boxes is checked and that's the decision of the editor based upon what the editors read from the viewers. So it'll either be an invitation to come back with a revision, or a flat out rejection, or some sort of acceptance.

Dr. Lozano:

I still think you can argue with rejection. If, if you, if you feel like they missed the point, maybe you didn't make it clear enough. I think a short letter to the editor saying, you know, this is a major study, because blah, blah, blah. And just put it very simply, these are the main points and I think the reviewers missed it, because I failed to clarify that in my thoughts, can I resubmit? And it's always, always a good idea.

Dr. Hunt:

Yeah, I think that strategy is good, because I have had the experience where I thought that it, you know, one reviewer was favorable and one was not. But the editor's letter did say that they were not going to accept a resubmission. And so I submitted to, I just took the manuscript, basically, and submitted to another journal. And I don't know if I got one of the same reviewers or what, but they had essentially the same questions. So it's probably worthwhile when you look at that rejection letter, rather than just to say, Okay I shot two high that time, I'm gonna move to another journal to actually go ahead and really address those questions. And, you know, deciding the editors letters, like you said, may help you decide whether you're gonna resubmit there or to another journal. But you probably need to address those points regardless and not just say well they missed the point. You know, but I need to try to describe it better.

Dr. Pagel:

I would like to tell you that there's at least one other person at M.D. Anderson who's had that same experience. Where they said, the heck with this, I'm not doing all of this that they're asking me to do. I'm just gonna send it to another journal. And he did, and it got the same reviewer, and it got the same comments. And he did not save anytime by just sending it to another journal.

Dr. Chamberlain:

Yeah, I, I reviewed for a journal that has a separate sheet for comments to the editor that are not included in the summary statement, so to speak. And I had to say, I read this article for another journal two months ago, and not one word has changed. Its still junk!

Dr. Pagel:

Any other questions? Sir? Hold; hold the button down please.

Audience:

Okay. I have a question. Will you please, could you tell us that how to attract reviewers and readers attention before we submit or when we submit our paper for consideration? So this may help us to modify our, to learn some things before we submit into the journal. Help to attract reviewers and the readers attention. Two words of a paper is really very important. Because every paper you have to seeing the project. So you are picking up very important in the field.

Dr. Lozano:

It's a difficult question, how do you attract, you know, how do you sell your story? I think the cover letter; especially for the major journals is very, very important. I've seen some cover letters that are two pages long, and that's just, the editors not gonna take the time to read the two pages. I think what you have to do in that cover letter is very succinctly put your observations in the context of the field. And why you think you've made a major observation. And sometimes I just use bullets, you know. I define the question and I say, this is what our paper contributes, 1, 2, 3, 4. Or maybe just 1 or 2 if they're really, really, you know, outstanding contributions. Sometimes you list the reviewers that you would want to review your paper. If I'm shooting it for a really high journal, I list the leaders in the field. I list the people that I know review for this journal. These people probably, or haven't seen the work, or maybe have seen bits and pieces of it, but just throwing in the name of some of the people that you feel should be outstanding reviewers for your paper helps as well.

Dr. Chamberlain:

Yeah, I, I think that what you describe as lobbying the editor or any reviewers prior to submission of the article I found to be largely useless on both, on both counts. If I, I've done some editing. And when I get a letter that says, this is the article I told you about in the elevator at AACR, you know, I, I'm not gonna remember that conversation. So
I, I found that that sort of lobbying is not very useful. But in the cover letter, if you can tell the editor you've published three articles on this topic in the last three years and list them by author that helps the editor. It tells the editor we, we've published on this topic. And we're not overloaded on this topic. And this, so, so it gains their attention. And mentioning who the authors of those articles are may, and the other leaders in the field who are listed on the editorial board can be very helpful to the editor. Cause that, that's information the editor doesn't have to research.

Dr. Pagel:

I would say, l, I this may be trivial, but I'd say, also be sure your article matches the scope as laid out in the front of the journal. And perhaps your letter, if its, if the connection is a little bit tenuous could show how your manuscript fits within their scope. I think people sometimes ignore that.

Audience:

I have a question. Some of the papers when you publish of your writing they ask you about the suggested viewers. What is the credit that we should choose for those?

Dr. Lozano:

Choose your friends.

Dr. Hunt:

Yeah. I think it's always a good idea to try to look for people that you know are familiar with the, with your research and the field. Because they're, they're going to have a better view overall of your work. If, the other thing that I didn't used to pay attention to, but I have started to a little bit more in certain areas is, when they give you the opportunity to say, is there anyone who shouldn't review this work? Make sure that you do put people that you know are, that you've met at meetings that really seem like they don't believe your work, and don't believe in what you're doing, or definitely your competitors, because they often will review it unfavorably, because of, of the competition. So really, you know, look at that carefully. If you know you've got some major competitors, or you've got some people who really are not at all favorable in terms of your work from other venues then I would make sure you list them that you don't want them as reviewers. And if you, it always helps if you know someone that reviews for that journal that has experience in your field, because I often get asked to review papers that aren't necessarily directly in my field, because I review for a journal. And you know, it's a lot harder for me to review. I have to do a lot more research sometimes. And, you know, it's just not as much fun. And so I don't know if I will give as favorable a review, unless it's just an incredible outstanding paper. So, you know, you, it does help you if you direct the reviews to someone, direct your paper to someone who knows something about your field.

Dr. Pagel:

I want the affirmation from people in the audience with experience, but my understanding is if you send your paper to someone at another institution for your help, they are now disqualified as reviewers. Am I correct about that? Does anybody? I don't know, maybe not.

Dr. Hunt:

I don't know. I mean I guess it would depend on, on the journal. If they're a collaborator, obviously, you know, then I think they can't be a reviewer. But if it's just someone who's in the field and maybe you asked for their, you know, quick read of it and see if they think it's important or not. I don't know that that's a conflict or not. I haven't really specifically seen that, to be honest with you, with many of the journals, but maybe.

Dr. Lozano:

Yeah, I haven't either. But if you're sending it to a colleague to ask whether they think it's appropriate for a top-notch journal or something, I guess I don't see why that would disqualify them if they've just given you their opinion.

Dr. Pagel:

Okay. Probably my misunderstanding then. Any other questions? Well, you know. Oh, you got one? Got an

Dr. Chamberlain:

Well I, I just, no. I, I just asked the audience, do any of you have experience with online journals? Do you?

Dr. Lozano:

Not yet.
Dr. Chamberlain:

Yeah. Well, you know, the potential is terrific here. They're typically unrated as far as impact, but I see them sited in, in reviews. And the turn around time potentially could be much faster. The cost for publishing, particularly your color images are significantly less than they are in print. So if you're in a field that relies on color images, whether they're fish or whatever. It may be possible for you to get lots of images into an article that's online that a print editor would never be able to afford.

Audience:

Can you describe some of the impact of usually when you submit an article to a journal you have to sign a copyright agreement giving the journal copyright that privilege, I guess is the way to describe it. Can you describe any of the impact that that has on what you present in later work?

Dr. Pagel:

I can tell you the legal, the legal responses that you do not; you do not own anything that you've transferred copyright to the publisher. So you now must seek permission of the publisher to reuse that work, with some exceptions. There are journals that have copyrighting transfer agreements that allow free use by the author of that material without specific permission as long as they site it's original publication.

Dr. Hunt:

So, I guess the major consideration that, I don't know, maybe you can give a specific example of what you're talking about. But I have had the experience where I wanted to use some of the data that I published in a paper in a book chapter that I was writing, and I didn't' realize that I need to have permission from the journal to put it in the book chapter. And then so when I submitted the book chapter and went to the editor there, then they came back and said I had to ask for permission. So I guess, which, I've never had the permission denied, you know, to use it. So I'm not sure that it, it's really a problem. But I guess whenever you're preparing something, even if it's your own work, you just have to understand that if you've published it exactly in that form previously that you need to have permission to publish it again.

Dr. Pagel:

I think it's important have heard exactly what she said, if you've published it before exactly in that form. So the pieces of data aren't copyrighted, but the form in which you report the data is copyrighted.

Dr. Chamberlain:

If your article describes a potentially patentable method or device, you need to take steps to protect that. And there are procedures here at M.D. Anderson to do that. You don't have to be an expert. You just need to call and find out how to do it.

Dr. Lozano:

Does that answer your question? Okay.

Dr. Pagel:

Any other questions from the audience or from Science Park?

Dr. Hunt:

I guess along that same line is your, from your last comment is that if you're going to publish something that might be, you know, you might want a patent rights or whatever, you need to submit this paperwork to the institution to initiate that process before you publish it. So if you have something very interesting that's new and novel, and you know, like, like he was saying, some type of way of analyzing data, some type of new device, or some therapeutic, then you really have to consider that and do that paperwork ahead of time.

Dr. Pagel:

Thank you very much. Very enjoyable.