

## Changing the editorial process at *JCI* and *JCI Insight* in response to the COVID-19 pandemic

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### Editorial

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# Changing the editorial process at *JCI* and *JCI Insight* in response to the COVID-19 pandemic

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The scientific community is grappling with the COVID-19 pandemic on several fronts. Most notably, our colleagues with expertise in infectious diseases, virology, public health, pulmonology, and critical care are working very hard to understand the spread of the disease, provide supportive care, and develop therapies that can be used effectively in the short and long term to control this pandemic. Clinicians and physician-scientists are leading our hospitals to respond to the crisis and handle the high demands of patients with diagnostic and intensive care needs.

Unfortunately, many research institutions in the US and around the world are facing shutdowns or restricted working conditions (such as limiting the number of researchers allowed in the laboratory), as universities comply with regulations for “social distancing” to prevent the spread of the virus. Harvard, MIT, Johns Hopkins, Albert Einstein, and several other universities have suspended noncritical research and face-to-face meetings in order to minimize the number of people in facilities at any one time, while allowing essential research activities to continue. Stanford University and several University of California campuses face even greater restrictions as Bay area residents are told to shelter in place. While it is unknown how long this pause in noncritical research activities will last, it is likely to be several weeks or months, depending on the outcome of the pandemic.

Just as for most workers, scientists are being directed to work from home. While for some this restriction may be a welcome break from travel and also provides time to focus on overdue writing projects, ultimately putting a pause on laboratory research hampers the short-term productivity of our academic institutions. Viewed from a more global scale, this pause in bench research will undoubtedly slow progress in biomedical research and investigation, since weeks and months of productive science will be lost. However, we are cognizant that it is necessary to slow the spread of the epidemic.

At the *JCI* and *JCI Insight*, our editorial boards are made up of active academic researchers, and we know firsthand how these disruptions are impacting our authors and broader community. Young scientists in particular must put their research projects and careers on hold while we wait for normal research activities to resume. We tried to put a human face on this problem and contemplate what we could do as a journal to improve our decision-making process during these exceptional times.

As editors, we always strive to be discerning about requests for revisions to manuscripts, while upholding the high standard of the journal. Given the ongoing restrictions, our weekly roundtable editorial board meetings have been converted into video meetings, and we will contin-

ue our tradition of vigorously discussing manuscripts. We are asking our board members and peer reviewers to be especially vigilant in guarding against unreasonable demands for revision that are not essential to the main conclusions of a manuscript. As such, we are making some adjustments to our decision framework as we consider new manuscripts and revisions. In some cases, we may choose to be more lenient regarding revision requests if the requested experiments do not fundamentally change the conclusions. For exceptional manuscripts, we may overrule requests from reviewers that the editorial board deems to be beyond the scope of reasonable revision in this current climate. In other cases, the board may determine that indeed additional studies are required to support fundamental conclusions and achieve the standard of excellence for which the *JCI* family of journals is known. Under these circumstances, we want to ensure that authors have adequate time to add new studies once normal conditions for laboratory activities resume. Authors who have been invited to revise are often allowed 12 months from the date of decision to resubmit. However, we recognize that additional extensions, beyond 12 months, may be needed for some authors.

As always, decisions on *JCI* and *JCI Insight* manuscripts are made on a case-by-case basis, as determined by the scientific merit of the work. Our goal is not to compromise on the rigor and quality of work that we publish, but to recognize the enormous disruption posed by the COVID-19 pandemic on the research enterprise and careers of our scientists. Science and discovery won't be on a pause forever. The *JCI* family of journals is eternally grateful for your service and contributions to science. We will ensure a fair standard for our authors during these extraordinary times.