Referee selection is critical to the review process, and our choice is based on many factors, including expertise, reputation, specific recommendations, and our previous experience with the referee. We avoid using referees who are chronically slow, sloppy, too harsh or too lenient. We invite referees and only on acceptance of the invitation will a referee have access to the full paper.

Manuscripts that are sent for formal review typically go to 2-3 referees. Based on their advice, the editor decides to:

- accept the manuscript, with or without minor revision
- invite the authors to revise the manuscript to address specific concerns before a final decision is reached
- reject the manuscript with an invitation to resubmit the work as a new paper once additional experiments have been carried out
- or reject the manuscript, typically on grounds of specialist interest, lack of novelty, insufficient conceptual advance or major technical and/or interpretational problems.

Unbiased, independent, critical assessment is an intrinsic part of all scholarly work, including the scientific process. Peer review is the critical assessment of manuscripts submitted to journals by experts who are not part of the editorial staff. All submitted manuscripts are reviewed by experts either on the editorial board or outside the board. Manuscripts are evaluated according to the following criteria: material is original and timely, writing is clear, study methods are appropriate, data are valid, conclusions are reasonable and supported by the data, information is important, and topic has general medical interest. Peer reviewer identities are kept confidential, but author identities are made known to reviewers.

In order to ensure fairness in the referee process, we try to avoid referees who: have recent or ongoing collaborations with the authors, have commented on drafts of the manuscript, are in direct competition, have a history of dispute with the authors, or have a financial interest in the outcome. Because it is not possible for the editors to know of all possible biases, however, we ask referees to draw our attention to anything that might affect their report, including commercial interests, and to decline to referee in cases where they feel unable to be objective. We do not find it necessary to exclude referees who have reviewed a paper for another journal; the fact that two journals have independently identified a particular person as well qualified to referee a paper does not decrease the validity of her/his opinion in our view.
Referees should treat the review process as being strictly confidential, and should keep the following guidelines in mind:

- manuscripts refereed for *Frontiers of Medicine* should not be discussed with anyone not directly involved in the review process
- if colleagues are consulted, they should be identified to the editors
- if experts from outside the referee's own laboratory are consulted, referees should check with the editors beforehand to avoid involving anyone who may have been excluded by the editor
- referees should, as a rule, not disclose their identities to the authors or to other colleagues since they may be asked to comment on the criticisms of other referees and may then find it difficult to be objective. Should they feel strongly about making their identities known to the authors, they should do so via the editor. We strongly disapprove of any attempt by authors to determine the identities of referees or to confront them, and encourage referees to neither confirm nor deny any speculation in this regard.

In spite of our best efforts to identify breaches of publication policy or ethical conduct, such as plagiarism or author conflict of interest, the referees who are more familiar with the field are more likely to recognise such problems and should alert the editors to any potential problems in this regard.
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