Guidance for Writing Excellent Research Manuscripts for Submission to Value in Health Regional Issues

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Part I (Taken from News Across Asia Volume 3 Number 3)

Bong-Min Yang, PhD, Co-Editor, Value in Health Regional Issues (Asia)

As Co-Editor-in-Chief of the Asia region for Value in Health Regional Issues, I would like to provide some guidance on how to write a manuscript that can be successfully submitted to the journal for publication. The research being done in the Asia region is growing rapidly, with the journal seeing an average of 60 manuscript submissions each year. Publication acceptance is competitive, however, with rejection rates as high as 60%. The journal, in the interest of developing key knowledge and increasing the evidence base of health research in Asia, strives to grow in quality through careful selection of manuscripts. This article will be the first of a four-part series designed to provide guidance to authors looking to submit. The subsequent three parts will be presented by the VIHRI Co-Editors of Asia.

A submitted manuscript is first considered by the Co-Editor-in-Chief, who then passes it on to a Co-Editor, if the paper is of reasonable quality. After a Co-Editor’s review and approval, the paper then proceeds to peer review. The journal’s topics coverage is broad, including health policy analysis, health economics, and outcomes research. However, the submission criteria for manuscripts is restrictive in that at least one of the manuscript’s authors must reside in Asia, and the study must be regarding the Asian region.

First and foremost, we look for solid scientific substance in a submission. We ask ourselves, as we recommend that you yourself do, is this a scientifically sound manuscript? What is hypothesized, what is provided as data-based evidence/examples, and is the conclusion appropriately drawn? Are there unfounded arguments being “supported” by anecdotes and non-scientific observations? Carefully consider your own paper on these points before submitting.

That said, the single largest challenge we see with the manuscript submissions we receive is facility in the use of the English language. Even the best scientific research, if relayed to its audience in broken sentences of poor English, fails to share and impart the valuable knowledge that it means to. To this end, it is a necessity that English writing quality meets a certain standard of fluency. If the quality of English writing is not good in your manuscript, we recommend seeking out English writing assistance to edit the manuscript to acceptable standards of coherence and eloquence.

From the journal’s perspective, we need to publish papers that are of interest to the health community at large in the Asia region. A solidly scientific and well-written paper that engenders little overall interest through its subject matter is not as valuable to the journal as one that presents a subject matter of strong interest that would be widely read, learned from, and utilized by others in their own learning and research endeavors. Consider the subject matter’s relevance and the health community’s interest level in it before submitting. We also recommend that authors consider the layout and presentation style of the manuscript. Two papers can discuss the same research but one that makes the subject matter relevant and for example, offers ideas on avenues for further research and debate, will spark stronger interest and therefore will more likely be chosen.

Finally, there have been paper submissions that I have seen throughout my tenure that are excessively promotional in nature. I pay particular attention to these as the preliminary reviewer as promoting any given drug, technology, etc., is something we wish to avoid as a journal, to protect the journal’s integrity as an impartial and science-based publication. As a matter of practice, if a submission, otherwise sound, is promotional in nature, I
will ask the authors to change the writing to remove those promotional notes and to present the research as is, allowing the data, analysis, and properly drawn conclusions to “do the talking.”

These are some key initial notes to consider when crafting your manuscripts for submission. In Part II of this series, which will be featured in *News Across Asia*, Volume 3, Number 4 (Winter 2014 Issue), Co-Editor Dr. Nathorn Chaiyakunapruk will provide meaningful examples from notable articles that have been published in the journal.

To view the forum presentation, view here.

**Part 2: (Taken from News Across Asia Volume 3 Number 4)**

Nathorn Chaiyakunapruk, PharmD, PhD, Co-Editor, *Value in Health Regional Issues* (Asia)

In the last issue of *News Across Asia*, ViHRI Co-Editor-in-Chief Bong-min Yang provided an introductory glance at writing excellent articles for the journal. As a Co-Editor of ViHRI, I would now like to continue this series by mentioning a specific resource for writing which is the CHEERS checklist. As we all know, one of the most common types of studies that have been submitted through our journal is the economic evaluation type; in fact we all might be aware of the Consolidated Health Economic Evaluation Reporting Standards (CHEERS) statement which has been recently published as a standard reporting guideline for economic evaluation. It has been recently adopted by our mother journal, *Value in Health* as a guideline for reporting economic evaluation.

The CHEERS guidelines were developed by a group of experts in the ISPOR Taskforce of the same name, and have been widely published and promulgated by leading health economics journals. It is highly useful in that it standardizes a reporting process that oftentimes is very fragmented and variable. CHEERS was developed to consolidate and update previous health economic evaluation guidelines, some of which included a checklist developed by health economist Michael Drummond checklist, and the British Medical Journal 36-point checklist. CHEERS provides recommendations in a 24-point checklist to optimize reporting.

When one looks closer at the guidelines, several key points emerge. First, it is necessary to clearly specify in the title and abstract what the objectives are. Evidence should be clearly indicated and specified in all of the relevant sections by page and line number, including the introduction, and also in the method section which covers target population, perspective, comparators, etc. In the results section, it must be specified have what kind of study parameters, incremental costs, outcomes, and NDA analysis were implemented. Essentially, the aim is to create a rational and clear standard of presentation.

The primary goal of CHEERS is to make sure that when the studies that have met all the requirements, it will make abundantly clear the study question and its importance to decision maker. And it helps the reviewer and reader to understand and be able to assess the study properly. Up until this point, poorly conceived studies were sometimes treated under the assumption that the author lacked proper training and methodology background. However, with these established standards, no assumptions need be made, fair critiques can be conducted and researchers have a blueprint for replicating the model report.

With a specific consideration for Asia-Pacific manuscript submissions, there are a greater proportion of problems in the description of methods section and references. Some journals utilize the format of supplementary appendices to address extensive data sources as well as provide additional description, which may be utilized by ViHRI submitters if needed. In particular, a full description of how the existing model has been adopted or modified or even developed is necessary. It’s quite common in Asia-Pacific to see papers that use a more global model and adapt it to the local context. It is thus very important to describe how it has been adapted and that type of model was used. That description would help reviewers to assess the study more properly.
As it is, published articles on economic evaluation in ViHRI are ever increasing, so it is more important that have all ViHRI manuscript submissions with economic evaluation adhere to CHEERS. This will bring the quality of the research in the region and its impact on the science to a new level.

**Part 3 (Taken from News Across Asia Volume 4 Number 1)**

**Jianfei (Jeff) Guo, PhD, RPh, Co-Editor, Value in Health Regional Issues (Asia)**

If we’re talking about writing a good manuscript, in my opinion there is no simple way to answer that question. As you might have read the previous two “excellent manuscript” articles, two editors summarized the key guidelines for our authors. My personal experience is that in order to write excellent manuscripts, we have to learn it from our own writing bit by bit, submitting and getting feedback, and revising accordingly many times. You will improve eventually.

As a rough guide, if you refer to articles published in Value in Health, you will see that they require standardized formatting such as topic background, as well as an objective, methodology, result, and conclusion sections. And this format is quite standard for other leading journals such as Science, Nature, New England Journal of Medicine, and JAMA. Oftentimes, when I am conducting my editorial reviews, for some papers, even if we give them the peer-reviewed feedback, we still have to go back and ask them to revise the methodology section if they are missing data or certain findings aren’t sufficiently supported. Each section has to have the strength and thoroughness to stand on its own merits.

This section will focus on some specific topic areas for our ViHRI. As a further help to curious potential submitters or authors in Asia, I would like to introduce a few topics that our journal, Value in Health Regional Issues is traditionally interested in and has a strong track history of accepting. A few examples include cost effectiveness, cost benefit analysis, mock up modeling for decision making, patient-centered outcomes research, pharmacoepidemiology, drug safety, public health, and public health policy. Of course, the possible applications of this are myriad and so the best way to hone in on particularly strong topics is to review past literature published in Value in Health and ViHRI, and if we take a look at the past ten years’ worth of topics, we find impactful studies such as the cost effectiveness of colonoscopy in screening for colorectal cancer, which covers one surgical procedure and screening, for one disease state. And that could apply to the U.S. or China; it follows the same model or principle. You could apply it Thailand, or Korea or Japan or any other Asian country/region, or even at the local hospital level if the data is sufficient. Another example would be cost effectiveness of population H. pylori screening and treatment. H. pylori, as you know, is a very common stomach disease, and the study could be applied toward your own local medical center using EMR or insurance claims data. Conducting that kind of pertinent outcomes research really has value for the region and the journal.

Another topic area includes pharmacoepidemiology and drug safety, which is also a very big area as it relates to health policy. We welcome you to submit a manuscript in this area relating to drug adverse events or drug utilization and evaluation in your hospital, drug utilization patterns in your insurance covered plan, pharmacotherapies of medication therapy management, risk and benefit problems, preventive or diagnostic or therapeutics, or even health delivery systems. All of these will be good topics for our Value in Health Regional Issues.

We also have topics for public health and public policy arenas. This is particularly valuable and I encourage our Asia-Pacific region researchers to submit more in this topic because both researchers and health care stakeholders in Europe and America are very interested in Asia development because we believe that this century may be Asia’s century, particularly as it develops so quickly and includes some of the largest global economies and also very big populations. Thus, it is important to keep in mind global audiences and global interests as well. Think about topics like immunization programs, and even rare diseases because we have large population with rare
diseases like hemophilia, Pompe, etc. Other issues like insurance coverage accessibility, reimbursement policy, drug pricing, hospital formulary, chronic disease impact in a society are also salient. Chronic diseases such as diabetes and hypertension can be particularly significant in large populations like China and India.

One example related to health policy is a paper that my colleague and I published introducing the Chinese drug safety surveillance system. The paper described Chinese FDA government setting for the adverse drug reporting system, and explored how the government collects, analyzes and publishes adverse drug reports. It also covered how to implement their interventions such as withdrawing literature or new drugs and issuing drug warnings. This type of study is particularly interesting and useful to some readers, even international organizations. In fact, after this paper published, a couple of organizations including the World Bank and University of Berkeley invited me to do a presentation about the study. So again, think about your audience. What impact will your study have? The bigger the impact and the broader the audience, the more likely your article will get published and be well-received.

Part 4 (Taken from News Across Asia Volume 4 Number 2)

Kenneth K.C. Lee, BSc, MPhil, PhD, Co-editor, Value in Health Regional Issues (Asia)

I am very pleased to share the final part of this 4 part series on writing excellent articles for Value in Health Regional Issues (ViHR). As one of the co-editors of ViHRI – Asia, one of the specific areas that I focus on in my reviews is health policy and I will be happy to share with you some of the major criteria the drives editorial decisions.

First and foremost, papers must be well-written. That may go without saying, but it is of the utmost importance. Papers must be of relevance to the region and must be of sufficient scientific value. I can tell you that at times it is rather frustrating that many authors submit their papers without following our recommended format, which makes our jobs much more difficult. For these cases, on one hand, they could be very interesting papers that we want to publish after reviewing, but on the other hand, the format is made in such a way that we will need to pump in a tremendous amount of resources in order for it to be compliant. So that puts us really in a dilemma and can often preclude a manuscript for publication.

Fellow co-editor Professor Nathorn Chaiyakunapruk previously mentioned about the ISPOR CHEERS guidelines in the second part of this article series, and I wanted to reemphasize the importance of the CHEERS guidelines. It is actually very important that if you are writing a cost effectiveness paper you adequately satisfy every single one of the 24 items in the checklist. But having said that, there are two additional points I wanted to add.

The first one is, apart from the CHEERS statement, if you are doing a modeling study, it is also important that you follow the ISPOR Modeling Good Research Practice guidelines. The other point I want to make is actually a tip. If you are satisfied that you have completely fulfilled the requirements of the CHEERS and modeling guidelines, then what would be really helpful to the co-editors is to make a statement of declaration under your methodology or introductory part that you have fulfilled the full requirement of the guidelines. That would help give the co-editors a very good initial impression that you are telling us that you aware of this requirement.

As I previously mentioned, my area of responsibility mainly lies in the health policy side, so I would like to share with you some positive impressions from the editorial board’s perspective. Let me first preface this by saying that the area of health policy for the journal is still much smaller than other areas due to fewer policy paper submissions, and so we highly encourage authors to submit papers in this area, which will have a higher likelihood of consideration and acceptance due to their reader appeal.

I’d like to share with you one well-written policy papers and the main reasons why it has been accepted for publication. The paper is titled Drug Reimbursement Decision-Making System in Iran. With regard to the objectives of the paper, since this particular area has not been previously studied the authors described the entire drug reimbursement process in Iran and they included most of the stakeholders involved while providing some recommendations on how to improve the system. In the methodology section there is a review of the existing...
policy describing the administrative rules and directives of stakeholders. In addition to that, they supplemented the content by conducting interviews with experts in the field and the policymakers involved. So what they put together is really a rather comprehensive view, although you can see from the methodology part that patients were not actually involved. If the patient side had been involved, that would have been even better and made the paper an excellent one.

Nevertheless, we sent it through peer review and comments from reviewers came back. From the comments we received, it was clear that the drug reimbursement process is a very interesting topic, in general it was a very well-written paper describing reimbursement process in Iran, the objectives were clear, the overall article was well-written and generally interesting. So these are all very positive comments from all three of the reviewers. There were also some cited areas for improvement, which included that there could be more explanation on the interviews, study methods and materials. Thus, the methodology could be laid out in greater detail. Another suggestion was to expand the introduction and discussion sections to include explanation on why it is important for the readers of ViHRI to know all of this information.

So we gave the comments of the reviewers to the authors and the authors came back with their defense. And they did improve the paper substantially. They included a few pieces of additional information such as interviews with policymakers and experts in different organizations that enabled them to add details about the reimbursement process. With regard to the source of data, they specified clearly that they were from publicly available statistics, especially drug sales statistics published by the Food and Drug Organization in Iran. The numbers on costs of drugs sold by drug distribution companies to pharmacies are available in these publications which enabled them to generate an overview of the current situation in Iran. So they cited their sources of data and improved the methodology quite a bit. Thus at the end it was submitted for publication and serves an example of a successful paper that had a strong foundation and underwent successful revisions.

I would also like to share a few common themes that emerged from rejected papers. Many papers receive poor reviews due to issues such as confusing or flawed rationale for employed methodologies, or poorly designed studies. Another key issue is lack of originality, whereby previous studies can be cited by reviewers that explain similar findings or address related topics. Another critical aspect is data and sample size – if the sample population or data are too few the validity or power of the findings will be called into question which can prevent the paper’s acceptance. Finally, if the paper’s conclusion isn’t reasonable or valid, or if it isn’t compelling enough, this can cause readers to question the value of the study. If the study doesn’t pass the fundamental test of “why does this matter?” then it will have a very high likelihood of rejection.

I hope that these suggestions will be helpful to our readers. On behalf of the ViHRI Asia Editorial Board, I want to sincerely thank you for your support of the journal and encourage you to continue submitting your manuscripts for publication. Your efforts are directly strengthening the development of sound HEOR practices in Asia.