

Dr. Putman et al reply

To the Editor:

We thank the authors¹ for their thoughtful discussion of the editorial process and for engaging with our lighthearted tone. We join their call to provide additional education about the editorial process and commend the many rheumatology editors and editorial staff who have already worked to improve transparency in publishing. We hope the dialogue here may provide additional insights for rheumatology researchers about the peer review process, optimizing the quality of manuscript submissions, and maintaining work-life balance.

Goyal et al¹ are correct that we did not have access to the day an associate editor received and reviewed the manuscript. In our experience as associate editors and as researchers who submit articles, the time from clearing technical checks to editor review varies from editor to editor and journal to journal. We suspect there is a large leftward skew to this time duration and still believe that editors receiving a “bolus” of manuscripts on Monday afternoon may contribute to the higher rate of desk rejections from weekend submissions. This does not imply that such rejections are done without critical review of the manuscript. On the contrary, in our editorial roles, we take desk rejections very seriously and review manuscripts thoroughly before making any such decision.

As highlighted in our original manuscript² and the letter by Goyal et al,¹ the quality of weekend submissions may ultimately be driving the association we reported. This could be due to a

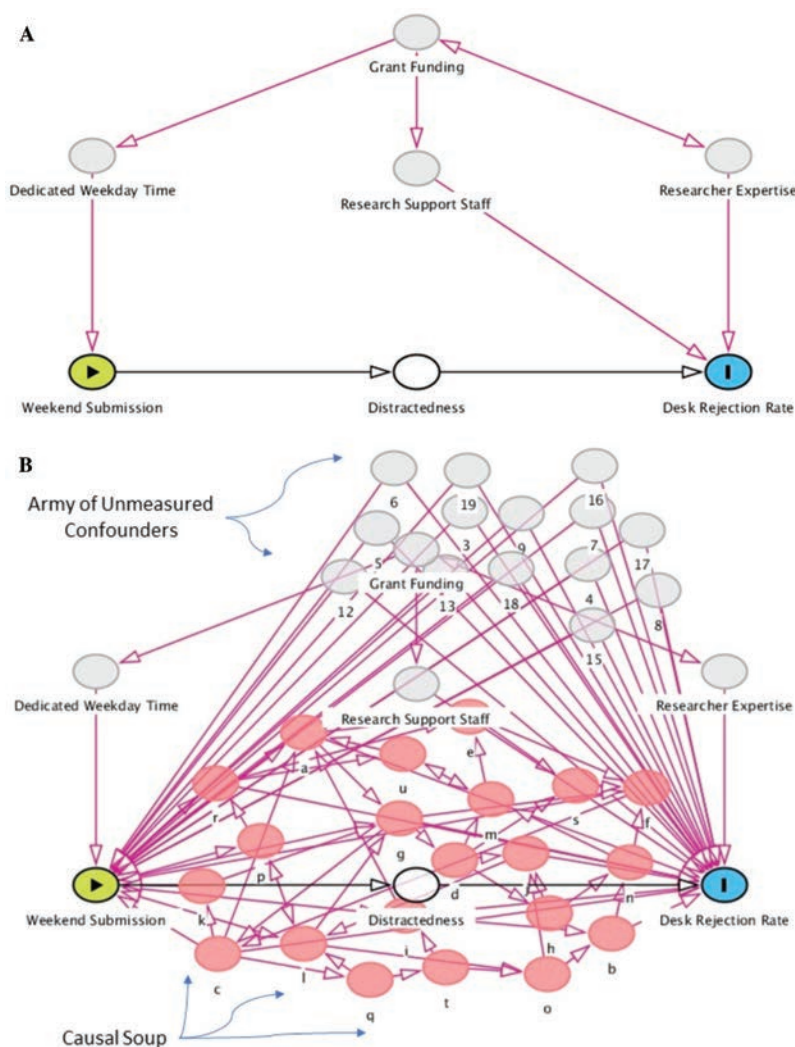



Figure 1. Directed acyclic graph depicting causal relationships between weekend submissions and desk rejection rates. (A) Idealized depiction of mediation and confounding that contribute to association between weekend submissions and desk rejection rates. (B) Realistic depiction of typical association in observational data, accounting for the causal soup of reality and certainty of multiple unmeasured confounders.

mediating effect, whereby researchers who submit on weekends become more distracted and incur a higher desk rejection rate. It may also be due to confounding, whereby researchers with protected weekday time for submitting manuscripts are also more likely to be those with grant funding, research support, and methodological expertise (Figure 1A). Viewed in this light, the solution to weekend desk rejections may be to increase funding for research at the federal level, support independent organizations such as the Rheumatology Research Foundation, provide training in research methodology in graduate medical education, foster a community of mentors who can support early-stage investigators, and provide the kinds of education about the editorial process as suggested by Goyal et al.¹

In the interim, the association we observed between weekend submissions and desk rejections exists. Disentangling individual effects from the causal soup of reality, which is likely affected by dozens of mediating variables and armies of unmeasured confounders, can be challenging (Figure 1B). Consequently, we intentionally avoided causal language because we believe that the association itself should be sufficient to discourage weekend submissions. The rheumatology workforce is shrinking² and reports substantial feelings of burnout,³ which we suspect may be ameliorated by a better work-life balance. Admittedly, we (yet again) submitted this manuscript on a Saturday, but we hope the readers of *The Journal of Rheumatology* will follow the age-old appeal of frazzled parents and overworked researchers to “do as we say, not as we do,” and take the weekend off.

Michael Putman¹ , MD, MSci

Jilaine Bolek Berquist², MD

Eric M. Ruderman³ , MD

Jeffrey A. Sparks⁴ , MD, MMSc

¹Medical College of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, Wisconsin;

²SSM Dean Medical Group, Madison, Wisconsin;

³Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine, Chicago;

⁴Brigham and Women's Hospital and Harvard Medical School, Boston, Massachusetts, USA.

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Address correspondence to Dr. M. Putman, Medical College of Wisconsin, Hub for Collaborative Medicine, 8701 Watertown Plank Rd, Rheumatology 8th Floor, Milwaukee, WI 53226, USA. Email: mputman@mcw.edu.

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