



Collaboration at every level

Peer review

Ostensibly the peer review system ensures information entering the mainstream of scientific thought has integrity and validity, thus advancing the interests of the community. But in relation to diet and diet-related diseases peer review has tended to result in conformity of views — views consistent with the commercial interests of the artificial pet food industry. What has gone wrong, and how much is the system to blame?

The mechanics are straightforward and commence with submission of a scientific paper, usually in triplicate, to a journal known to publish material in that particular field of enquiry. The editor, whose name is published in the journal, assesses the document and decides upon suitable reviewers, also called referees. In general referees are two or three in number and their identity is not disclosed. As peers of the author they are expected to advise the editor to accept, conditionally accept or reject the paper for publication. The final decision rests with the editor who then communicates with the author.

Editors and peer reviewers praise the system. In his book *How to Write and Publish a Scientific Paper* Robert Day quotes the opinion: ‘all editors, and most authors, will affirm that there is hardly a paper published that has not been improved, often substantially, by the revisions suggested by referees.’ Day agrees with the scientist who asserted: ‘editors encounter very few instances of unfairness and blatant bias expressed by referees; perhaps for 0.1 per cent or less of the manuscripts handled, an editor is obliged to discount the referees’ comments.’¹

Authors are the other major group participating in and reinforcing the peer review process. Successful authors seldom have