Peer review of manuscripts is the bane of the editorial process in most scientific journals. The editor and associate editor cannot be experts in all scientific areas covered by a journal. Therefore, in many cases, without peer review or an external opinion, it is difficult or impossible to determine the quality and relevance of a submission. Reviewers inform the editor whether the paper reports relevant new information, has valid data and is readable.\(^1\)\(^2\) Admittedly, the process is imperfect, and occasionally a deserving paper is rejected or a badly flawed paper is accepted. However, in most cases, papers are improved in response to peer review, even those that are rejected and ultimately published in another journal. Why then is peer review an issue in most journals? The answer is the inability in many cases to obtain timely reviews.\(^3\)\(^4\) The Journal tries to notify authors of the acceptability of their submission within 3-4 weeks of submission. Sadly, at an average of 49 days (Min-Max: 2-144 days), the Journal is not close to achieving this goal and failure to obtain timely peer reviews is one of the biggest obstacles.

For an editor, there are two phases in obtaining a review of a manuscript. The first is identifying and receiving agreement by qualified individuals to do a review. Most people quickly accept or decline an invitation to perform a manuscript review. However, occasionally there is no response or one that is quite delayed. The second is receiving the review. Most reviews are received by the deadline and reflect thoughtful consideration of the paper. However, a minority do not arrive by the deadline, and some are extremely late even after repeated reminders being sent. Furthermore, a small number are never received. Delays in both these phases result in delays, sometimes quite prolonged, in notifying an author about the status of their paper.

What can be done? The answer can be summarized in a two letter word, “no.” No matter how interesting the article appears to be or how much you want to “help out,” just say “no” if you cannot with great certainty complete the review in the allocated time. Alternatively, if you say “yes,” there is a professional obligation to complete the task by the deadline. This guideline also applies to requests to write editorials, review papers, book chapters and many other academic and clinical activities in our lives as well. It is absolutely fine to decline because you are too busy or have other priorities. Failure to produce by the deadline creates consternation and more work for everyone involved.

As my tenure as editor of the Journal nears completion, I have been blessed by interactions with many dedicated deputy and associate editors, editorial board members, reviewers and editorial staff. Unfortunately, despite the best efforts of many, the curse of the late peer review has not been lifted. Perhaps if paradoxically more say “no” rather than “yes,” the next editor can dispel the curse.

CITATION

REFERENCES
2. Roohi E, Mahian O. Some opinions on the review process of research papers destined for publication. Sci Eng Ethics 2014 Apr 30. [Epub ahead of print].