The Journal of Laryngology & Otology

cambridge.org/jlo

Author's reply

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Reply

Cite this article: Wallace J, Kanegaonkar R. Author's reply. *J Laryngol Otol* 2020;**134**: 465–465. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022215120000924

First published online: 27 May 2020

Dear Editors,

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to Fouladian *et al*., who suggest that scholarly review articles could be used to identify and evaluate clinically useful smartphone applications. We appreciated their review of 'The Buckingham Virtual Tympanum' as an example; a subjective evaluation of an application, in addition to a review of the associated published literature, may be useful in raising the profile of such applications. In our article, we noted a paucity of unbiased evidence-based research for the majority of these smartphone applications, and subsequently the bulk of such reviews is likely to be 'anecdotal', to use the authors' description. Despite this, these articles could still be useful in highlighting and promoting the discussion of novel and clinically relevant applications. It would be important to maintain credibility; concise, peer-reviewed articles which avoid the common pitfalls that affect scholarly book reviews, such as personal bias and conflict of interest, would be of most value to the reader. Multiple reviews of an application by different authors would be optimal to ensure an entirely objective evaluation.

Modern education and clinical practice is a multimedia affair, and offering smartphone applications a similar appraisal process to books is indicative of this. We would agree that structured, peer-reviewed scholarly review articles would be valuable for identifying and encouraging the discussion of clinically relevant applications. The lack of an evidence base for clinical smartphone applications could be seen as a limiting factor for scholarly review. However, perhaps by being subject to academic appraisal, the onus would be on the developers to provide objective evidence of the quality of their application, through clinical research.

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022215120000924 Published online by Cambridge University Press