Science Editor • October – December 2012 • Vol 35 • No 1 • 19

Annual Meeting Reports

Learning the Ropes: Mentorship in Scientific Editing

Speakers:
Ann R Punnoose
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How do scientists and doctors become journal editors? Scientific publishing relies on the contributions and expertise of professionals in specialized fields of study not only for content but also for peer review, editorialship, and guidance. However, the education and training of botanists, physicists, and child and adolescent psychiatrists rarely includes lessons in scientific editing. Hinting at the fortuitous beginning of his own editorial career with a picture of the escalator on which it was first suggested that he become an editor, Andrés Martin began the session by discussing how editors have traditionally taken on the role—by being in the right place at the right time, by rising through the ranks, or, less appealingly, by seeking money and recognition. He compared common career-pathway models of doctors, clinicians who are also educators or scholars, and, less commonly, clinicians who are also editors. The knowledge and skill sets for this hybrid clinician–editor model is most typically passed down through mentorship, rather than formal education, when an experienced clinician-editor has an opportunity to share some understanding of the many puzzle pieces involved in creating a publication and, ideally, to help to build a pipeline of future editors capable of taking the reins. Speakers Ann R Punnoose and Stacy S Drury then spoke of their editorial positions with JAMA and the Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (JAACAP), respectively, as two contrasting models of mentorship.

“Being an editor at JAMA is a humbling job”

Punnoose, the 2011–2012 Fishbein Fellow of JAMA, spoke about the year that she spent working full time as a reviewing editor and rotating through different departments with JAMA. The Fishbein Fellowship, named for former Editor-in-Chief Morris Fishbein, was established in 1977 to expose physicians to the skills and practicalities involved in scientific publishing. Working at JAMA, Punnoose shepherded papers through the peer-review process, presented to JAMA editors at manuscript meetings, edited and prepared manuscripts, created podcasts, and wrote several patient pages and a cover essay for JAMA. She also covered the conference of the Radiological Society of North America as a member of the press and wrote a news article, for JAMA, on research presented at the conference.1 Punnoose hopes to follow in the footsteps of past Fishbein Fellows, who have gone on to become contributing deputy, and senior editors, both at JAMA and at other organizations.

“Mosaic mentoring”

Drury is the second John F McDermott Editor-in-Residence (EiR) for JAACAP. Established in 2008, this position is younger than the Fishbein Fellowship and is still evolving in form and function. In contrast to the Fishbein Fellowship, the position is not on site, and much of the training and mentorship are achieved through e-mails and conference calls. The position is designed to be part time and, given its early development, has permitted each EiR to develop different goals and face different challenges. The inaugural EiR, Schuyler W Henderson, MD, MPH, participated in the coordination of two columns in JAACAP and became involved with CSE, writing an article about the development of future editors.2 During his term, the JAACAP editors were able to learn and observe the successful and possibly unsuccessful aspects of the EiR position and to change the course and direction of the position accordingly. Henderson will soon return to JAACAP as the assistant editor of the Book Forum. Drury became the EiR after serving as a contributing editor. Although she does not work on site, she has participated in conference calls with senior editors, many of whom have been involved in her mentorship, in a model that she refers to as “mosaic mentoring”. During her term, the EiR position has been focused not only on manuscript recruitment but on peer-reviewing and the production process of JAACAP. She wrote about her EiR experience in an article published in AACAP News.3 The divergent experiences and achievements of the first two EiRs have provided important information to the JAACAP editors as this new position continues to be sculpted to fit the needs of future EiRs but also the goals of the journal in establishing and supporting the position.

Those are just two examples of models for mentorship, but together they raise a number of questions about how to guide early-career clinicians and scientists into editorial roles. Still unanswered

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What to Include in Your Instructions for Authors

George Kendall emphasized the need for the IAs to be effective resources that guide authors, reviewers, and editors through the submission, review, and publication process. The IA should convey the personality of the journal (who we are) and state the requirements for publication (what we want). In general, contact information should be placed near the top of the IA, and there should be a table of contents so that readers can readily access a specific section of interest. Kendall suggested that the IA contain four sections: general, including ethical policies; the types of articles that the journal publishes; manuscript content requirements; and how to submit a finished manuscript. He then discussed how reviewer guidelines (RG) should closely parallel the IAs. For example, the RG should clearly define the types of content that the journal seeks to publish, including level of originality and reader interest. Reviewers should also be guided by the manuscript evaluation form, which can be designed to emphasize the journal’s interests and technical guidelines. Finally, Kendall emphasized the need for the editorial office to develop clear and concise IA and RG that serve not only authors and reviewers but editors and editorial staff.

Dana Compton provided another perspective on the use and value of the IA. She said that PNAS uses the IA as a resource document for authors, staff, and vendors. PNAS staff rely on the document to answer authors’ questions about journal guidelines, and vendors use it to obtain details about the journal’s content and scope. She noted that the goal of the IA is to be a central hub for all the journal’s resources. Yet, whether it is easy for authors to use is a major concern. In particular, the IA is very long, and this may make it difficult for authors to locate the information that they need. However, PNAS has a resource section in its IA that contains heavily used resources, such as the license for authors, a tool to check the length of a manuscript, and guidelines for preparation of digital art and inclusion of supporting information. She also provided a few tips about what to include in the IA: Make the IA concise by including only essential information, make the format user friendly (tabbed view and searchable), and remember your audience, which may extend beyond authors.

The questions generated from the talks revealed the complexity of keeping the IA user friendly and content rich. Suggestions from the audience included publishing a submission checklist for authors, distributing IAs at society meetings, and visually highlighting the revisions and updates of IA content.

References