Journal Training Wheels: Building a Pipeline of Future Authors, Reviewers, and Editors

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How do we train authors and early career researchers with the skills they need to be effective reviewers and editors? In this intense session full of practical advice and tips, we were privileged to hear from three speakers who have all set up training programs doing exactly that.

Our first speaker, Kathy Pieper, has been with the journal Neurology for 16 years. Along with the Resident and Fellow Section editors, she has been mentoring neurology trainees since the training program’s inception in 2004. The program provides a forum for new researchers to publish articles and helps them learn the ins and outs of peer review.

Launched online only (to keep costs low), this section began with a few submission subcategories: Education Research, Career Choices, and Residency Training. They now have 15 article types and have added new interactive offerings. One current key initiative is the “Call for Authors” section, which lists suggested article topics. Users can check out interesting topics, and interested submitters have six weeks (plus grace) to submit. If there is no submission by this time, the topic opens back up. “Mystery cases”—where a teaser of the case is shared on social media before they are published—help encourage interaction, and “e-Pearls”—just 85 words—encourage new authors to get involved.

The program has seen rapid growth in the last decade and now has more than 500 unsolicited submissions per year. In 2014, they published 150 articles, up from 10 (heavily solicited) articles in the first year. What makes for a successful initiative? Pieper introduced three key themes, which were also prominent throughout all three speakers’ talks:

1. Provide a positive and open environment: Those who join the program usually want to offer ideas in a safe environment.

1. Keep focus and momentum through regular calls: For this, it is important that everyone is comfortable with the technologies being used.

1. Build transferrable skills that researchers can take forward: This helps them to continue to contribute beyond the end of the program.

Jason Roberts described the “article review club” training program he set up with the journal Headache, which is now in its fourth year. Two society members lead a Skype call twice a month, and each time they focus on a different element of the review process. They then look at examples—Roberts sends them six papers, and the group picks one to be the live case they work on. The review they produce is used by the journal as an extra review.

When they start out, the trainees are very critical: “It’s like a shark tank—papers get ripped to shreds!” as Roberts describes it, and this has been fed back into the teaching sessions. Discussing ethics is important; for example, this is often the first time the trainees have seen a confidentiality agreement, which they have to sign before they can participate in the program.

Overall this initiative has been “tremendous in fostering relationships with early career researchers” Roberts concluded; the society is similarly excited by how this develops the active member who will continue to contribute in years to come.

Promoting the development of transferrable skills was a key reason behind the launch of the Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (JAACAP) Connect, the online extension of JAACAP that focuses on practical translational and skills-building articles. Michelle Horner described the dual mentorship model that has been a core part of the program’s success: in addition to a “content mentor”, the trainee’s “editorial mentor” is a friend and guide who works closely with authors every step of the way, ensuring that they “never worry alone”.

Ensuring the trainees have a positive experience makes them more likely to refer others, and it all starts with a phone call to find out what they’re passionate

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reviewing proofs after outsourced copy-editing and composition. Kaufman reiterated the significance of communication, saying, “Understand the nuances of your publisher’s workflow as they understand yours.” Constructive complaints must be shared, but societies should remain open to the publisher’s ideas. Whether deciding on a publisher or currently working with one, constant communication is key, allowing the publisher to hear and address client needs. Both SP and CP have advantages and disadvantages, and one path may not be ideal for a particular publication.

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violation risks, Wiley undertakes several steps including (in escalating seriousness) investigation (very important because of the need for accurate records), negotiation, threats, partnerships with peer publishers in group actions, litigation, and criminal prosecution. McKenzie concluded by noting that the CTA is critical as proof that the publisher is the authorized repository of the version of record. When versions are not under the publisher’s control, corrections and retractions may be missing, with potentially serious implications such as dosage or chemical formula errors.

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What to Expect in the Future?
These speakers agreed that content cannot be repurposed if data sources are not shared. Beyond policy changes, the solutions will result from industry standards, public data repositories, data descriptors, formal credits, accession codes, and community support.

Stack pointed again to the Institute of Medicine and its January 2015 recommendations: “Biomedical journals have an important role to play in advancing the creation of an environment in which sharing of clinical trial data is a standard and an expectation for publication in the scientific literature.”

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about; Horner emphasized this early interaction as a key first step. Naturally, some trainees rise to the top, and JAACAP Connect provides opportunities for these authors to do more, including mentoring experiences for guest editors and editorial board positions, which further helps to build the pipeline.

No two trainees have the same level of experience or expertise when they start, however, and Horner closed the session with a clear piece of advice: find out what your trainees need help with and use this to improve your program. It will pay off in the long run, as these three successful programs have all demonstrated that.

Program Links and Contact Information
- Neurology Resident & Fellow Section: www.neurology.org/site/feature/index.xhtml
  Contact: kpieper@neurology.org
- JAACAP Connect: www.jaacap.com/content/connect
  Contact: connect@jaacap.org

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