

## Care and Treatment of the Disappointed Author

**CBE Views 1980;3(3):2-3**

What obligations does the editor owe the rejected author? Many investigators believe that a letter of rejection terminates all communication between the investigator and editor. I have a different journalistic philosophy. It is my premise that initial editorial review offers opportunity for the onset of dialogue among editors, reviewers, and authors.

Many authors are reluctant to respond to editors when they disagree with negative editorial comments. Part of the problem may be the traditional view that peer review is a judgmental rather than an educational process. I conduct what I term an open editorial office in which I am responsive to letters or phone calls regarding the editorial review process. This offers continuing and open lines of communication to provide full adjudication of investigators' differences with referees' opinions. I am receiving an ever-increasing number of phone calls and letters from authors who identify specific points of difference with the consultative analyses. The ultimate disposition of a paper is not the most critical element in the editorial review. The preparation and submission of a formal manuscript can be a valuable learning experience if the review process identifies errors in scientific approach or cognitive knowledge. The primary goal of learning can be achieved best if the concerns of the disappointed author lead to further evaluation by editors and reviewers and, whenever indicated, by submission to additional reviewers.

Recently I returned an author's objections to a referee, who responded promptly: "Thank you for sending me the author's rebuttal. Regardless of what you as an editor choose to do, I feel that this is appropriate both to the author of the manuscript and to this reviewer. Through such a mechanism I think that scientific questions can in many cases be sorted out and should always be available as a recourse to the author of the manuscript which has been refused publication"(1).

What options are available when con-

sultants differ in their recommendations for acceptance and rejection? It is morally incumbent upon the editor to permit the author to see the varying opinions, although admittedly this introduces many sensitive and potentially confusing elements in the final editorial judgment. When faced with conflicting opinions as to the merit of the study, I have often thought of the statement of Comroe and Dripps that the reluctance to publish articles on which editorial referees disagree is one of the factors responsible for the slow application of new knowledge (2, p. 72). One method that I use to permit dissemination of controversial material is to encourage publication of a rebuttal in the same issue. This can be effected in the form of a signed editorial that identifies possible deficiencies or differences of approach. Critical readers can serve as a source of continuing evaluation of the validity and significance of published data.

Fallacious judgments by editorial boards can deny the appearance of potentially valuable work or delay such publication. Consultants are not omniscient, and every effort should be made to encourage an environment of maximum flexibility and open-mindedness to new and perhaps iconoclastic concepts. Above all else, the editor should be aware that serious errors can be prevented only if there is an ongoing exchange of views in the prepublication phase.

Alfred Soffer, MD  
Park Ridge, IL

### REFERENCES

1. Soffer A: The open editorial office. *Chest* 73:125, 1978
2. Comroe JO Jr., Dripps RD: The Top Ten Clinical Advances in Cardiovascular-Pulmonary Medicine and Surgery, 1945-1975. DHEW publication no. (NIH)78-1521. Washington, Government Printing Office, 1977

## *The Creed of the Author's Editor*

### **Martha M. Tacker**

As an author's editor, I will "help the author guide his reader confidently, logically, and persuasively from the beginning of his story to the end" (Cox, B.G., MC Proc 49:314-317, 1974). In pursuit of this goal, I will apply my skill with the English language and my knowledge of science to help produce a clear and accurate message that is conveyed through appropriate language, format, and technical style.

I will seek to establish a productive relationship with the author by initiating and maintaining a courteous, honest, and open dialogue from our initial analysis of the manuscript to our final evaluation of the editorial service provided. I will reach a mutual agreement with the author about the extent of editing required; I will make only those changes that are within the limit of our agreement and that I can justify as an efficient use of my time. I will present my changes with confidence and my queries and suggestions with tact. I will regard the

manuscript and all related correspondence and conferences as confidential. I will take professional responsibility for my work, and I will expect to receive the credit appropriate for my contributions.

I will make available to the author my knowledge of other aspects of scientific publishing and my ability to help him improve the quality of his writing.

To provide these services with competence, I will constantly strive to improve my editorial skills, to increase my understanding of the English language, to maintain and broaden my scientific knowledge, and to increase my understanding of and appreciation for all facets of scientific publishing.

*CBE Newsletter*  
Number 21  
August 1976