

## EDITORIAL

# **The Journey to Publication and Support for the Peer-Review Process**

I have had the opportunity to serve as *CJNR* Assistant Editor for the last 18 months. During this time I have learned a great deal about the process through which nursing science comes to be published in our journal. I would like to share some of what I have learned with you and then hone in on the essence of a peer-reviewed journal — the peer-review process itself.

Each member of the team that transforms a manuscript into a published article has a specific role. The members of the Editorial Board — the Editor, Assistant Editor, and Managing Editor — determine the future of the Journal, revise policy, and put systems in place to improve quality and efficiency. The Managing Editor reviews each manuscript briefly upon receipt to ensure that the author has followed the general guidelines for *CJNR* submissions (see Information for Authors). The Editor and Assistant Editor, in conjunction with the Guest Editor in the case of submissions for focus issues, evaluate the content of the manuscript, determine whether it should be sent out for review, select appropriate reviewers, and finally accept or reject it. The Editorial Board bases its final decision on the comments of the reviewers, its own assessment of the manuscript, and practical issues such as the number of manuscripts awaiting publication at that particular time. The Editorial Board sends the reviewers' comments to the author with recommendations. The reviewers are selected to appraise a specific manuscript based on their area of expertise as well as their availability. The role of reviewer is key in maintaining the Journal's standards of scholarship. This will be discussed in greater detail below.

The Copy Editor is responsible for editing the manuscript once it has been accepted for publication. The Copy Editor makes whatever changes are necessary to ensure clarity and sharpness of the work, corrects syntactical and grammatical errors, and ensures that all citations are presented in full in the reference section as specified in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 4th Edition*, and that only works cited appear in the reference section. The Copy

Editor makes recommendations to the author concerning the elimination of ambiguities, correction of misleading or inaccurate information, removal or addition of citations, and filling out of incomplete references. The copy-edited manuscript is returned to the author for review and, if necessary, final adjustment. Finally, the translator translates the titles and abstracts into French.

As you can see, the publication of nursing science requires several steps and the involvement of several individuals. To ensure maximal efficiency at every stage, the Editorial Board has recently put in place a system for evaluating its own performance. This includes a close examination of data permitting comparisons across time and against self-defined standards on: number of manuscripts received; number of days from receipt to final disposition of each manuscript, and number of days at each step; and quality of reviews. Based on our most recent evaluation, we have set benchmarks for each of these indicators for the coming year.

I am keenly interested in the review process and have wondered what role the Journal could play in maximizing the benefits of the process for our authors, reviewers, editors, and, most importantly, you, our readers. The goals of peer review are several: (1) to help authors maintain credibility by identifying errors they might have overlooked, (2) to protect readers from inaccurate or irrelevant information, (3) to protect clients from practice that is based on unclear or incorrectly presented research results, and (4) to help editors determine which submissions merit publication (Goldbeck-Wood, 1998). A well-executed review process will have beneficial outcomes even when a manuscript is not ultimately published: for the author, an improved manuscript and greater clarity of thought on the topic being addressed; for the reviewer, a firsthand look at the latest research and an opportunity to participate in the research community by helping to improve the work of colleagues. However, the literature on the topic of peer review suggests that the process also presents difficulties (King, McGuire, Longman, & Carroll-Johnson, 1997). It is slow, time-consuming, and subjective; and it can stifle innovation, harbour conflict of interest, be hurtful to the author if not conducted respectfully, fail to detect errors, and fail to respect confidentiality.

The *CJNR* Editorial Board currently has a pool of approximately 330 reviewers from which to draw. Most are researchers while some are clinical, non-research, experts. The selection criteria for reviewers are expertise in the subject or in the methodology used and a history of

having been published. The process is currently set up to be “double blind”: the authors are not told the identity of the reviewers and the reviewers are not told the identity of the authors.

In order to maximize the benefits of the review process, the Editorial Board has begun to offer greater support for reviewers. A new orientation packet comprises an information sheet clearly outlining the obligations of reviewers, a reading list, and sample reviews. An excellent reviewer is one with high standards, knowledge of the subject matter — including an ability to cite references that the author may have missed — and an ability to identify key issues and defend his or her comments. An excellent reviewer can see how a manuscript might add to the body of knowledge in the field and communicates suggestions to the author clearly, making specific recommendations on content, organization, and style in a constructive and courteous manner. An excellent reviewer is able to go beyond an emotional reaction to the topic or the results, shows a willingness to learn from the author, and identifies any conflict of interest to the editors.

The second form of support for *CJNR* reviewers is provision of the comments of the other reviewers and the letter to the author (blinded) indicating the final outcome of the submission. Thus reviewers are able to compare points they have raised against those raised by the other reviewers. This can be helpful in identifying errors in the manuscript that may have been missed by one or another of the reviewers, in gaining a deeper understanding of the manuscript under review, and in confirming remarks made to the author.

The third form of support for reviewers is an annual performance evaluation. This is currently being initiated. Reviewers are being given feedback on their review with regard to: (a) comprehensiveness; (b) specificity (clearly stating suggestions on content, organization, style, references); (c) constructive, courteous, mentoring tone; (d) validity; and (e) timeliness of response. Reviewers are being provided with group averages on each of these items to permit them to benchmark themselves.

I hope you have now learned something of the internal workings of the *CJNR* and will see that the initiatives being taken by the Editorial Board to promote efficiency are a logical step in our quest for excellence. We look forward to receiving your feedback on this process, and we encourage any interested potential reviewers (and, of course, authors) to contact us. If done well, reviewing and publishing nursing science can be a rewarding experience for everyone.

**References**

- Goldbeck-Wood, S. (1998). What makes a good reviewer of manuscripts? *British Medical Journal*, 316, 86.
- King, C.R., McGuire, D.B., Longman, A.J., & Carroll-Johnson, R.M. (1997). Peer review, authorship, ethics, and conflict of interest. *Image: Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, 29(2), 163–167.

**Anita J. Gagnon**  
**Assistant Editor**