The Role of Editors As Mentors
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Among my earliest experiences as an author, I had the good fortune—no, actually it was just plain old dumb luck—to send a manuscript to Nursing Outlook. Edith Patton Lewis (Pat) was the editor and her philosophy was that of mentoring authors. She would, of course, have to reject some manuscripts, but always did so with a thoughtful critique, including suggestions for revisions and other journals to try based on the topic and her perception of the fit with the journals’ missions. If interested in a manuscript and believed it to be appropriate for Nursing Outlook, Pat would offer specific suggestions for a rewrite, as well as her edits to meet journal style and length requirements. Pat had a unique way of teaching authors how to write better and loved to mentor inexperienced authors. Reflecting on her editorial career, in response to a query about what she liked best about her 35 years in nursing publishing, Pat responded: “Working with nurses who want to write” (Lewis, 1980).

Several editors with whom I am acquainted have continued this philosophy of mentorship to encourage fledgling authors, rather than sending them into a “toss it in the bottom drawer and forget it and I’ll never submit anything again” funk. Outstanding among them is Phyllis Stern, Editor Emeritus of Health Care for Women International, and Professor Emeriti in the Department of Family Health Care Nursing at Indiana University. During her tenure as editor of Health Care for Women International, she fostered the art of mentoring. If she believed a manuscript was appropriate for the journal, she would stick with the author until it was ready to publish, as long as the author was willing to do the work of rewriting (Hawkins, 2006, pp. 559-562). This willingness to help inexperienced authors is particularly important for faculty members and other nurses whose very careers may depend on engaging in scholarly activities including producing publishable manuscripts.

College and university nurse faculty are often rewarded for writing for publication, as are clinical nursing leaders. Merit raises and promotions in rank may be closely tied to scholarly productivity. Thus, rejection letters eventually can lead to loss of a promotion or even a position on a college or university faculty or in an academic clinical center. If these nurses become sufficiently discouraged by rejections or even requests for significant revisions, they may choose to leave academic or clinical leadership positions, contributing to an already worrisome shortage of experienced clinical leaders and faculty members.

Faced with a rejection letter, some authors will just give up. I have mentored authors who thought that the reviewers’ suggestions and an editor’s request for a rewrite and resubmission meant that the manuscript had been rejected. Authors are sometimes too overwhelmed by any negative comments to even attempt a rewrite.

I have noticed over time that editors are preparing much more detailed and specific instructions for authors to follow as they revise manuscripts. Some editors are taking the time to suggest more suitable journals for the authors to try. I realize this is a very time intensive undertaking. Some
editors receive so many manuscripts that this would be an impossible task. The compensation is almost insignificant for many nurse editors and non-existent for reviewers, so the incentive to mentor authors must come from a personal commitment. Thus, mentoring is essentially a gift to the profession from editors and reviewers.

We who are editors, reviewers, and/or experienced authors might consider formalizing mentoring as modeled by the Fellows of the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners. The Fellows of the American Academy of Nursing are considering creating a formal mentoring program as well. Mentoring new and inexperienced authors would involve short-term consultation or coaching, rather than the long-term commitment that characterizes formal mentoring relationships (Hayes, 2005, pp. 442-445). Editors and editorial boards might also consider establishing mentoring programs for new authors, drawing on experienced writers to serve as the mentors. Two examples of such programs will illustrate this idea.

The *Journal of Pediatric Pharmacology and Therapeutics* (2009) has a formal mentoring program for new authors. To take part in this program, authors send their manuscripts to the editor requesting mentoring help, and the editor selects a mentor with expertise in the author's therapeutic area. The mentor will make comments and suggestions, serving as a risk free reviewer to guide the author in rewriting the manuscript before submitting it. If the mentor suggests considerable substantive revision, the author can choose to invite the mentor to be a co-author.

The journal of the International Association for Conflict Management, entitled *Negotiation and Conflict Management Research*, has a similar mentoring program (IACM, 2009). Mentors are volunteers among the more experienced authors writing for this journal. An author can request a mentor. The role of the mentor is to be negotiated between author and mentor. This role can include helping the author prepare the manuscript so that it is ready to be submitted and reviewed, suggesting rewriting to make it stronger, and counseling the author on other journals that might be more appropriate for the topic.

I have found that faculty members and clinical nurse leaders, the logical persons to mentor their students and other neophyte nurse authors to write and publish, may have their own needs to be mentored and feel less than competent to mentor others in this particular skill set. With a large number of faculty members and clinical nursing leaders in the baby boom generation retiring, those who are replacing them may be young and relatively inexperienced in their academic or clinical careers and need mentoring themselves. What better activity for editors, editorial board members, and especially these retired expert authors to engage in as they consider how to help the next generation of nurse authors? We authors who are experienced at writing and editing might assist the editors of nursing journals, particularly those sponsored by professional organizations, to set up mentoring programs and assist in providing the mentoring.

**References**


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