

# Nurse Author & Editor

## Volume 23 - December 2013, Issue 4

### What are Editors for?

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Many people are described as editors although their roles may differ significantly. In this article I am considering the role of those editors in charge of journals, sometimes working on their own, sometimes leading a team, and variously described as the 'Editor', 'Editor-in-Chief', 'Chief Editor' and 'Executive Editor'. Regardless of the title—and I will simply refer to them all as 'Editors'. Just what do they do?

### The Authors' Perspective

From the authors' perspective—and based on the correspondence I receive as an Editor—it is clear that some think our job is simply to publish their papers, without comment, alteration or delay. Authors also frequently draw comparisons between disparate journals. While the urgency to publish is understood and shared by editors, most of whom are also active academics, we have to be selective. Most established journals are published in volumes and for those in, or wishing to be considered for, the impact factor system managed by Thompson Reuters, then the number of pages to be published annually has to be advised ahead of the year of publication. We have limited space and where a journal is receiving more publications per year than it has space to publish, success for one author uses valuable space that can only be created by rejecting another paper. If we do not enact some selectivity and all papers are deemed worthy of publication, then every paper published adds to the lag between acceptance and appearance in print. Next to rejection, one of the most frequent complaints I receive is about the length of time taken to publish.

Therefore, Editors have to be involved in deciding what goes forward for review, and this will often involve deciding what goes to the rest of the editorial team. For this reason, rejection may take place quickly after submission, sometimes within a few hours but usually within a few days. Rejection at this stage may be for many reasons and is often not based on a particularly well considered assessment of papers at this stage. Papers not conforming to published guidelines or which have clumsy titles with, for example, grammatical errors or which describe topics that may have been studied already in depth will often be returned with little comment. Rejection at this stage is not an indication that a paper is unpublishable, only that it is not going to be published in the journal to which it has been submitted. From the authors' perspective, the quicker you learn this the better as you then have the opportunity to submit elsewhere. At the other end of the process, where papers have been put forward for consideration by other editors and reviewers, then the Editor is usually responsible for making the final decision. Papers rejected in the course of review may not reach the Editor.

### The Publishers' Perspective

Publishers expect Editors to implement appropriate standards for the journal, many of which are now agreed across a wide range of journals. In addition, the Editor is responsible for the quality assurance of the contents, and this includes advising and assisting in the appointment of editors and

reviewers and ensuring that standards are adhered to, fairly applied to all authors, and kept under review. As such, the Editor usually avoids involvement in the editorial and reviewing processes of papers and is kept in reserve as a final point of appeal against the decisions of editors and reviewers in accordance with procedures. Those procedures should be published in the journal.

At a more mundane level, and related to the section above on the authors' perspective, the Editor is responsible for ensuring that publishing deadlines are met; this is related to 'copy flow' or the flow of papers from manuscript to final copy. Editors do not work alone in this respect, and they have editorial assistance from the publisher and production staff to produce the final copy. Nevertheless, the Editor is responsible for ensuring that there is sufficient copy available for production of regular issues as per the publication schedule in addition to meeting the pre-determined page length. The publishers monitor this process and provide regular advice to the Editor in order that the copy flow can be regulated. The regulation of copy flow will be considered below under the Editors' perspective.

Finally, the publisher expects the Editor to be an ambassador for the journal and the publishing company. As such the Editor is expected to have and to maintain their own scholarly output, and to have a high profile nationally and internationally. Editors usually have full time academic positions, and the publisher expects them to organise their editorial work around other responsibilities.

### **The Editors' Perspective**

Editors mainly do the job because they like it and not because they have to. They are not full time, and they have to organise their editorial work such that their 'day job' does not suffer. Many also realise that their editorial positions bring great kudos to their schools and universities, and many are expected—although not all are encouraged—to undertake such duties.

The nature of the work of an Editor will be dictated by the stage of development of the journal for which they are responsible. Frankly, this means that their work is largely determined by the ratio of papers being submitted to the space that is available. If space exceeds submissions, then the Editor will be engaged in encouraging submissions, often proactively, and will be reluctant to reject material lest they do not manage to fill the pages and the journal becomes unviable. Towards that end, the Editor and any associates will spend more time on any individual manuscript than Editors of more established journals. Clearly, the Editor and the publisher work closely to regulate the growth of the journal, in terms of page length, in line with actual and projected submissions.

When a journal has reached a steady state whereby submissions roughly equal the available space, the Editor, instead of working hard themselves to ensure the quality of each paper that is published, can then begin to consider the quality of the submissions and begin to be more selective. Once the balance is tipped in favour of submissions on a well established journal, and the publisher decides that the journal has grown sufficiently in size, then the situation described at the start of this article prevails. It is an unfortunate truth that, while the Editor will be keen to encourage the submission of the best manuscripts, when copy exceeds space, reasons for rejection become less considered, and the opportunity to correct even minor problems is rarely afforded authors.

### **Conclusion**

I hope that this paper has provided some insight into the role of Editors and also impressed on you that not all journals are equal in terms of workload and the decisions that have to be made. Likewise, the decisions made by one Editor may differ entirely from those of another, and the work of two Editors can rarely be compared.

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