Editor Transition Transitioning Between Editors: Describing the Process
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When one editor’s term ends, another’s begins. However, the transition simply doesn’t occur over the span of a single day. As Deborah K. Mayer (DKM) says,

“You don’t start out your term as an editor. You leave as an editor.”

A structured approach over an extended period of time will ensure a
seamless transition for the incoming editor and a continuation of a publication’s high quality. Such an approach was followed when DKM’s term as editor of the *Clinical Journal of Oncology Nursing (CJON)* was coming to a close and Lisa Kennedy Sheldon’s (LKS’s) term was beginning.

Established in 1997, *CJON* is published six times per year by the Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) and is directed to nurses caring for patients with or at risk for cancer. The *CJON* mission is twofold: (1) to provide practical information necessary to care for patients and their families across the cancer continuum and (2) to develop publication skills in oncology nurses (ONS, 2015). The journal has a robust publishing pipeline, aided by a peer-review board and an editorial board. Each issue contains 12 articles and 8 columns plus an editorial. In addition, single-topic supplements are occasionally published. This means the journal annually publishes 72 articles (each about 3,000 words), 48 columns (each about 1,500 words), and six editorials (each about 750 words). As a result of this high volume of content, the timeline for the transition to a new editor was established early—when DKM’s contract was renewed for her second term.

Approximately a year before the end of the contract, active work on the recruitment process began, with a review and revision of the editor’s job description as well as finalizing the search process for the editor-elect. Announcements were developed, including requirements for the application and a submission deadline, and appeared via ONS’s website, print publications, e-newsletters, and social media as well as through the International Academy of Nursing Editors (INANE) website. A search committee was simultaneously established, which included ONS members and staff. DKM collaborated with the committee regarding interview
questions, but she did not formally participate in the search process.

Throughout this time, DKM created a detailed guide about the activities she performed. Topics included manuscript reviews, editing and submitting articles and columns for each issue, selecting reviewers, and matching novice authors with mentors for the mentoring program. This guide went beyond the position description and outlined the regularly occurring and occasional events that had become incorporated into the role.

About eight months before the end of DKM’s term, the search committee selected LKS as the editor-elect from a large pool of highly qualified candidates. LKS brought a strong writing background to the position, including a prior role as an Associate Editor on the editorial board of CJON. The editor-elect role was established to provide the time to learn the position’s responsibilities under the tutelage of the outgoing editor and staff. In this way, LKS could acclimate to the readership and vice versa as opposed to an abrupt transition. Orientation was a multiphase process. LKS initially received the editor’s guide from DKM and significant reference materials from ONS, including the ONS style guide, editorial board manual, past meeting minutes, reader survey results, and so on. During her five months as editor-elect, LKS worked with ONS staff and DKM, learning all steps of the publication process (see Table 1). LKS performed each task at least once with DKM to ensure greater understanding and to allow for questions. During this editor-elect period, LKS and DKM had two conference calls to discuss processes as well as two 1.5-day in-person meetings. The first meeting occurred with LKS and DKM. An overview of the entire process was provided as well as an introduction to Manuscript Central, which is an online system housing the peer-review process. After that initial meeting,
LKS began managing all new manuscript submissions, selecting and collaborating with peer reviewers and rendering manuscript decisions. LKS also worked with DKM to select several editorial board members to fill roles for those who were rotating off. In this way, the board would begin to reflect LKS’s vision for CJON.

The second in-person meeting occurred at the ONS office and included the editor, editor-elect, and publishing staff. This meeting reviewed Manuscript Central, focused on the process from manuscript acceptance through publication, and provided an opportunity for the editor-elect to build relationships with the publishing team. In addition, the agenda for the annual editorial board meeting was drafted. The second meeting was especially helpful as many questions arose when trying to implement the processes learned during the first in-person session.

According to LKS,

“The meeting with the editor and staff was invaluable. It felt like ‘on-the-job’ training and increased my confidence in assuming my new role. I was also able to develop relationships with journal staff with whom I will be working closely throughout my term.”

After the in-person meetings, staff increasingly worked with LKS on production-related questions, with DKM easing out of the role. This occurred gradually so that when the editor-elect term ended in conjunction with DKM’s, LKS was well positioned to assume all of the responsibilities of the position.
Creating a transition plan provides a step-wise approach to training a new editor. The five-month overlap between the outgoing and incoming editors allowed for a gradual transition of the responsibilities of the editor with opportunities to identify and resolve issues as they arose. In addition, in-person meetings with the editorial staff were helpful in clarifying the publication process as well as building strong relationships. Finally, ongoing communication helps create a seamless transition and maintains the quality of the publication.

Table 1. Transition Timeline

| Six to Nine Months Prior to the Transition | • The position description is updated. |
| • The search committee is identified. |
| • The position is advertised. |
| • Interviews are conducted. |
| • The editor-elect is selected. |

• The editor-elect is announced to the editorial board, association members, and others via print, social media, and a press release.

• Staff provide the editor-elect with initial reference materials, including the editorial board manual, past meeting minutes, contact information, and production schedules.

• Staff create an editor-elect email as well as access to Manuscript Central, the online manuscript submission system.

• A conference call is conducted so the editor-elect can meet the publishing staff and learn about Manuscript Central.

• The editor-elect meets in-person with the editor to learn about the peer-review process, editing, and use of Manuscript Central.

• The editor-elect begins managing new manuscript submissions, including the peer review and decision-making processes.
- The editor-elect is copied on all articles going to press for final review.
- The editor-elect selects new associate editors to replace those scheduled to rotate off.

Four Months Prior

- The editor-elect edits and submits an issue’s columns and follows them through to publication. This includes reviewing galleys, ensuring that queries are answered appropriately, etc.
- The editor-elect observes the editor’s review and technical edit of an issue’s full-length articles.
- A second two-hour conference call is conducted to review the manuscript submission system.

Three Months Prior

- An in-person orientation meeting is held with the editor, editor-elect, and publishing staff.
- The editor-elect edits all columns for the next issue.

Two Months Prior

- The editor-elect edits all columns and articles for the first issue she’ll oversee independently after the editor term begins.
- The editor-elect establishes the final agenda for the annual editorial board meeting with staff.

One Month Prior

- The editor completes the transition, sharing any additional best practices and/or reminders.

Transition

- The editor-elect assumes the editorship, managing the editorial board meeting and all responsibilities of the role. The past editor
Occurs remains available as needed for occasional questions or issues that may arise regarding manuscripts previously accepted.

REFERENCE


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