

Nurse Author & Editor

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Editor-in-Chief Role: View from JAN

What Does an Editor-in-Chief Actually Do: The View from the *Journal of Advanced Nursing*

Roger Watson

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I recall a television programme about a famous orchestra with a distinguished conductor. The conductor was being filmed putting the orchestra through its paces prior to an important performance and he was asked a question which, I am sure, many have wondered: “Could the orchestra play just as well without you?” to which the conductor replied, “Oh yes, easily.” He turned to the orchestra, tapped his baton on the music stand and told them to play, which they did...perfectly. Frankly, I sometimes wonder if it is not the same for Editors-in-Chief.

Different journals operate different models of editorship and use a range of titles. Sometimes, “Editor” and “Editor-in-Chief” are used. Here, I am referring to an Editor-in-Chief who is responsible for a team of editors and who is not necessarily involved in the daily work of dealing with reviews and reviewers or, generally, corresponding with the authorship of their journal. This certainly describes what I don’t do at *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, but what is it that I—or any other Editor-in-Chief with a similar role—do?

When I do writing workshops around the world I am often asked what the “chief editor” does and my reply is invariably: maintaining copy flow; ensuring quality in what is published; and promoting the journal internationally. Of course, I do not do this alone and work with an excellent team—editors and publishing staff—without whom copy flow and quality would be impossible. I know my editing and publishing colleagues also do a great deal to promote the journal. So, in terms of the above aspects of editorial work, the team could probably function perfectly well without me. I do filter what goes forward to editors as I am the first to see submissions but this is not rocket science. We are inundated with submissions—which is good—and we have the luxury of selecting those which look most interesting, clearly fit the scope of the journal and which are written in accordance with our guidelines. I also sign off all the accepted manuscripts from editors and edit the final manuscript and correct the final proofs. Again, it is not inconceivable that another member of the team could do this. Perhaps the one difference here is that I take sole responsibility for what is published; this is not shared.

Beyond that is where my job as Editor-in-Chief has some unique aspects. I am in almost daily contact—sometimes several times daily—with the publisher about a wide range of issues. I keep a distance from the reviewing processes of the journal so that I can deal, independently, with appeals against editorial decisions. These

are infrequent but remarkably time consuming. Investigating alleged breaches of publication ethics is also in my domain and, while not common these can also be very time consuming. Such is the length of the investigations that it is very rare not to be dealing with at least one case at any given time.

The above are tangible examples of the management and administrative work of an Editor-in-Chief but the less tangible aspect of the role is leadership and vision. These involve keeping abreast of developments in academic publishing and having views, for the publisher and for the audiences I frequently address across the world, on these developments. Essentially, it is a matter of deciding what should be implemented in the journal to keep us up-to-date and ahead of competitors in our procedures and processes, especially related to international standards in the field. Sometimes these decisions are subtle, such as updating our author guidance; sometimes they are quite significant such as our periodic decisions at *JAN* not to accept particular categories of manuscript which are no longer being cited.

The work of an Editor-in-Chief is composed of regular, daily aspects which ensure that authors receive the best possible service in terms of rapid decisions and equitable treatment. However, some aspects are very varied and infrequent. The role of Editor-in-Chief of a major journal in any field is a considerable privilege and one which, generally, commands respect in your profession. Sometimes we do not get things right, but one of the major qualities of any Editor-in-Chief must be an ability to learn from mistakes, quickly make amends when things go wrong, and to ensure that mistakes are not repeated. The reputation of a journal, a team of editors, and a publishing house is in your hands.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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