

# Nurse Author & Editor

*Leslie H. Nicoll, PhD, MBA, RN, FAAN Editor-in-Chief*

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## Succession Planning for Editors

### **What Does an Editor Do? Creates a Succession Plan**

Teresa Shellenbarger and Patricia S. Yoder-Wise

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Through a variety of sources such as those published in *Nurse Author & Editor*, many readers know the basics of what an editor does (Miller & Burke, 2017; Watson, 2013; Watson, 2017). These activities include receiving and reviewing manuscripts, deciding which ones are sent to reviewers and who those reviewers should be. The editor also considers what reviewers say and makes a final decision about the author's next step. Sometimes that means synthesizing disparate views or it may involve softening a message so the author can "hear" what to do next. Editors also work with the publisher to consider aspects of publication including marketing, circulation, reader analysis, and journal usage.

Having been an editor for several years, I, Pat Yoder-Wise, decided several years ago to be active in developing the next generation of editors. As a result, *Nursing Forum* created a Deputy Editor position that allowed for mentoring and ensuring that the next cohort of editors would develop the essential skills to be ready to assume an editor role in the future. The title, Deputy Editor, was proposed by the first person to occupy this role, Maria Shirey. The intent was to show this was a distinct role within the Review Board; the expectation was that the deputy editor would eventually accept the role as an editor for a publication. Maria has done this and is now the Editor-in-Chief for the *Journal of Healthcare Quality*. At *Nursing Forum*, we once again have a distinguished author with prior editorial board experience, Teresa Shellenbarger, serving as Deputy Editor and assuming a joint role to review and update the work of the journal and be guided in development of critical skills.

Just as in healthcare, academia, and professional organizations, succession planning comprises an important part of the strategic vision for an editor and journal. Major life events such as illness, changes in work roles, or even an expansion in journal demands are other reasons to consider the development of future leaders who can carry on the journal work if needed. Carefully considering who can follow in leadership positions ensures that qualified people are available to fill those important roles, promotes consistency during transitions, offers stability in operation and management of journal activities, and possibly decreases the amount of time needed for a successor to take over (Branden & Sharts-Hopko, 2017). This opportunity to develop the talent of others and cultivate their knowledge, skills, and attitudes allows editors to “pay it forward,” offer responsible stewardship, and feel they are contributing to the future of the journal and development of others (Marshall & Broome, 2017).

## FACTORS FOR EDITORS TO CONSIDER

The goal of selecting a deputy editor is to develop individuals with a career aspiration of being an editor with additional skills to make that person more successful in a future selection process. Additionally, the intent is to have someone well versed in the ongoing operations of a journal, in this case *Nursing Forum*, so that they could readily assume the editor role, even for a provisional time. Thus, this developmental activity is a combination of creating an interim staffing agent and a leadership succession plan. An editor will want to consider a variety of factors to select a deputy editor, including choosing the right person who is suitable for the role, with respect to timing, work relationships, and expectations.

The editor will want to seek an individual who is emerging as a potential leader in publication. A good deputy editor is likely someone who has an understanding of the review process used by journals, publication experience, and prior editorial board involvement. One place to begin the search is to look at the journal's pool of board members and reviewers. Reviewers who provide quality reviews that are sensitive to authors, submit them in a timely manner, and offer well-written, thoughtful, and constructive feedback when critiquing manuscripts become prime candidates. Board members who offer useful suggestions or raise insightful questions regarding journal operations could also be considered. Having an established professional network is also helpful for the deputy editor as this can be used to recruit potential contributors and reviewers. Lastly, publication history is important because the deputy editor should be someone who has experience as a successful author. Having this beginning understanding of the various roles associated with journal publication provides a solid foundation from which to build. If the deputy editor is missing any of these experiences, learning opportunities may need to be provided to gain this understanding.

Another key factor to consider in the selection of a deputy editor is the professional working styles of those involved. It is important to have or develop a relationship that allows for open communication, mutual respect, and exchange of ideas and information. Editors may also want to consider individuals who provide a complementary skill set. If the editor tends to be a big picture thinker and faces challenges managing details, then a deputy editor who brings those strengths can be helpful. Also, having two people who approach problems or issues in a different way may be more effective than working in isolation and only seeing one viewpoint.

Clearly specifying the roles and expectations for the deputy editor is important to ensure understanding of the responsibilities that come with the job. The editor needs to realize that this is a mentoring relationship and activities that have been typically addressed solely by the editor may now require collaborative decision making. Processes need to be explained so that the deputy editor can see the full scope of editing activities and understand rationales for decisions that are made. The editor also needs to be willing to accept critical review of journal operations as the deputy editor may bring forward new ideas or challenge existing processes. Regular and ongoing contact, either via phone conference or in-person meetings is essential for discussion of various aspects of the work. Critically important is the fact that the deputy editor has to feel free to speak up regarding learning needs, problems, and new ideas.

## THE ROLE OF THE DEPUTY EDITOR

Various activities comprise the role of the deputy editor. Although the deputy editor eventually can assume all of the work of an editor, our initial work at *Nursing Forum* focused on review of the mission statement and aims and scope for the journal. This allowed for both the editor and deputy editor to shape the ongoing vision for the journal for the board's consideration. We also reviewed the

Guidelines for Authors to make them more comprehensive as more specific expectations have evolved for various manuscript formats. For example, there has been an increase in clinical trial reports being submitted to *Nursing Forum* but guidance for preparing these manuscripts was not mentioned in the Information for Authors. These developments allowed us to collaboratively craft the guidelines for future journal submissions. This type of work needs to be reviewed by the broader board membership for their views so they can provide further input on the comprehensiveness of the work and a revalidation of the mission, aims, and scope of the journal. Once this initial work is completed, we will ask the Editorial Board to review what we have done and offer further advice.

Other activities for the deputy editor include recruiting additional reviewers and editorial board members and examining the peer review process and reviewer activities. Jointly, we make decisions about manuscript acceptance, communicate those decisions to authors, and compile content for each issue. The deputy editor is involved in planning for editorial board meetings and interacting with board members. The deputy editor can also help to promote the journal and increase journal visibility either through personal connections, conference attendance, or using social media so that potential authors consider publication with the journal. Monitoring the influence of the journal through metrics and providing insight into the impact and performance patterns of the journal is another aspect of the deputy editor role. Working collaboratively with the editor and publisher to understand the “behind the scenes” operations of journal publication is also a very important learning experience for the deputy editor.

Other journals and editors may want to consider the deputy editor position as a way to mentor the next generation of editors to ensure they will have necessary experience to advance journal publication. This unique approach provides the deputy editor with a nurturing and supportive learning environment that

cultivates growth while allowing the editor to share insight and experience. Sharing expertise in this collaborative way has shown to be beneficial and contributes positively to ongoing publication and scholarship.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Teresa Shellenbarger, PhD, RN, CNE, ANEF is a Distinguished University Professor in the Department of Nursing and Allied Health Professions at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Indiana, PA. She is a member of the Authors-in-Residence for *Nurse Author & Editor* and has recently become the Deputy Editor for *Nursing Forum*.

Patricia S. Yoder-Wise, RN, EdD, NEA-BC, ANEF, FAAN is President of The Wise Group and Professor and Dean Emerita, Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center (Lubbock). She is the Editor-in-Chief of *Nursing Forum* and *The Journal of Continuing Education in Nursing* and a member of the Authors-in Residence for *Nurse Author & Editor*.

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