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Becoming a Journal Editor

Creating a Path to Become a Journal Editor

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Heard on the street: “I would like to learn about the editor role and don’t know where to start. I don’t even know where the opportunities are or how to qualify if there seems to be a match for me out there someday.”

Not knowing where to start to explore becoming a nursing journal editor is certainly an understandable situation, because this is not a career path that is open to large numbers of people. There is a finite number of nursing journals which limits the positions available and being an editor requires knowledge, experience and appropriate educational credentials. Even so, there are opportunities, and if you are passionate about doing this, it is a viable path! With some thought and careful planning, you may very well achieve your goal of being an editor.

LEARN THE ROPES

As with any career aspiration, you need to be knowledgeable about the role and network with people who can help you. There are many resources that you can access. The following list is a starting point that you can use to branch out and learn more.

- Become familiar with the International Academy of Nursing Editors (INANE). As a starter, bookmark the INANE website (nursingeditors.com) and spend time exploring the resources that are offered there. The home page of the website often has postings of editor positions that are available, so it is important to visit the site frequently to see what's new.
- Learn about journals in nursing—not just in your specialty area (you should already know about those)—but across the scope of the profession. A starting point is the Directory of Nursing Journals, which is a joint venture between INANE and this publication, *Nurse Author & Editor*. This link: <http://naepub.com/journals-directory/> will take you to a page where you can learn more about the directory and how journals are selected. Then visit the directory itself and start exploring!
- Are you a subscriber to *Nurse Author & Editor* (<http://naepub.com/>)? If not, why not? This publication is specifically designed to address all dimensions of writing, publishing, and editing in nursing. There is no charge to subscribe and new content is posted on the 5th and 20th of every month.
- Check the resources listed on the INANE website in the “Resources” section. Here you will find a number of journal articles about editing, including research about the editor’s role and about the peer review process that editors oversee (<https://nursingeditors.com/resources/editorial-roles/>).
- Follow the Scholarly Kitchen Blog (<https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/>), the blog of the Society of Scholarly Publishing. This blog covers every issue imaginable related to publishing and editing, some of which will be interesting to

you, and some of which will not. The important thing is to “plug in” to the world of scholarly publishing and be well informed about what is happening.

- Follow Retraction Watch (<http://retractionwatch.com/>). This is a site which tracks retractions in the published literature, “as a window into the scientific process.” The articles are well-written and very revealing about the bad behaviors going on in scientific publications.
- Browse “The Editors Handbook.” This book is now being revised and the third edition will be out this summer! The second edition is still for sale in various places, but I would suggest you save your money and wait for the third edition which will be making its debut very soon. Note that in the interest of full disclosure, I am a co-author on this new edition of the Handbook.

START NETWORKING

In addition to reading and learning about the editor role, it is wise to get to know some editors—networking is always an essential part of any successful job search. Networking with editors may turn into mentoring (for you) which may in turn open doors to you for editorial roles. So how do you do that? Here are some suggestions:

- As you have become aware of INANE through the website, you might want to join the INANE email lists, of which there are two: INANE Mentor and INANE Email Update. The INANE Mentor list is designed for folks who have a desire to learn more writing, publishing and editing, but aren’t necessarily in active editorial-type roles at the moment. There are many current editors who are on the INANE Mentor list (hence, the name) so it is an excellent resource for getting your feet wet. The INANE Email Update list is designed for those who are in active roles, which can include editors of all types (Editor-in-Chief, Managing Editor, Associate Editor, etc.), editorial board members, peer reviewers, publishers, and librarians.

To join either list, send a message via the INANE contact page, (<https://nursingeditors.com/feedback/>), identifying your interest and describing your involvement with dissemination of knowledge through the published literature. Novice and experienced editors alike start discussions on both lists that will give you important insights into the role.

- Attend the annual INANE conference. Since 1982, INANE has had an annual meeting, which brings together about 150 nursing editors, publishers, and others in venues both inside and outside of North America. Generally held over three days, the conference has a mix of general sessions as well as breakouts and posters. The 2019 conference will be held in Reno, NV (<https://inane2019.com/>) and registration is open now. Future conferences are scheduled for Nashville (2020) and Dublin, Ireland (2021).
- This year, for the first time, there will be a pre-conference workshop: E3: Extreme Education for Editors, designed for new editors and editor “wannabes” although those who are more experienced in the role are also welcome to attend. (<https://inane2019.com/e3-pre-conference-workshop/>). If there is any way to be there for this workshop, make it happen! It is scheduled for July 29, 2019 and will also be in Reno. As of this writing, the workshop has not sold out.
- Attend a COPE Forum. The Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) has formal forums where cases are presented and everyone in attendance discusses the issue and provides suggestions for successful resolution. Attending a COPE Forum is a great way to begin to learn about the ethical issues that editors face which is a major part of the job. COPE has forums throughout the year in locations around the world. For the past several years, a COPE Forum has been on the agenda for the INANE meeting, and this tradition is holding true in Reno. If I haven't made the point clearly enough: attending an INANE conference serves the goals of education and networking neatly, in one three day package!

- Consider attending the International Congress on Peer Review and Scientific Publication, which is held every four years. The next congress is scheduled for September 12-14, 2021 and will be held in Chicago (<https://peerreviewcongress.org/index.html>).

CLIMB THE LADDER

Now for the second part of the original question—how can you meet the requirements to become a nursing journal editor? There is not a school that you can attend to earn a qualifying credential, but there are many things you can do to move in this direction. As with any professional role, you need to “climb the ladder” to gain experience and knowledge. In general, activities that are on the career path to editorship include:

- A track record of successful publication in peer reviewed journals;
- Experience as a peer reviewer with one or more journals; you want to fulfill the expectations of a reviewer at the highest level—provide thorough and constructive reviews that are completed within the time frame requested by the editor.
- Serve in a role with a journal, such as an editorial board member, associate editor, or contributor, such as writing a regularly appearing column or department. Note that these activities should be in addition to peer review experience.

Editors and publishers are giving more attention to succession planning—thinking about who will fill the shoes of the current editor when they move on. Having a strong, mentoring relationship between an outgoing and incoming editor is ideal. This helps to ensure a smooth transition without evidence of issues or problems for journal readers—that is, the journal is published on schedule with a full complement of articles, perhaps with an editorial written by the new editor. Of course, a succession plan is not always possible—I know of several cases where editors stepped down abruptly because of illness and were not available to help

with orientation for the new editor. Worse, editors may be asked to leave their role and lingering bad feelings would not make for a positive relationship between new and old. However, let's not imagine the worst! Once you get to know some editors, especially in your field, let them know of your interest in moving up the ladder. Ask for opportunities to serve or better yet, volunteer some ideas and then follow through and do what you suggested. Once an editor gets to know you, and knows you are a go-to person who gets things done, they will remember you for future openings.

IT TAKES TIME

Realize that all of this takes time. You are looking at a multi-year career path to move into an editor role. In addition to establishing a track record as author, peer reviewer, and journal contributor, you also need educational qualifications (generally an MSN at a minimum; DNP or PhD is usually preferred) plus overall nursing experience of at least 5-10 years. If you think this is too long, keep in mind that it helps you develop your skills and knowledge, and also determine if you like the work. I have known people who have worked hard to become an editor and then, once they are in the role, find out they are completely unsuited for the job and don't enjoy it! I know it seems hard to believe but knowing this at the outset could have saved everyone a lot of time and energy.

I think it is very important to realize that you can't cut corners. I recently met a nurse who had decided that her path to becoming an editor was to start a new journal. While this is exactly what I did in 1978 when I started *Advances in Nursing Science*, the days of being able to do this easily are long gone. I think the 1970s and 1980s were the "golden age" of nursing journal development and innovation. Changes in education with rapid development of PhD programs all signaled a need for more outlets for publishing scholarly works as well as research. But now, with over 240 journals in nursing (using the Directory of Nursing Journals as a

benchmark), the scholarly literature is pretty well saturated. Bringing a new journal to fruition is something that requires an enormous investment of time, energy, and start-up funding. Unfortunately, with online tools, some people believe that digital publishing is a “free” and easy way to start a new journal—but this is not true. Clark and Watson (2019) offer more details on this topic. I suggest you read their editorial.

The other dimension of “cutting corners to save time” is the potential to be pulled in by a predatory journal. The landscape of digital publishing has attracted disreputable publishers who see opportunities to exploit authors who are eager, sometimes desperate to publish, and who recruit naive would-be editors to become editorial board members, associate editors, or even an “honorary” editor-in-chief. Unfortunately, associating yourself with a predatory publication is not going to enhance your resume, nor will it give you the satisfaction of being involved with a high-quality journal whose reputation precedes you. With colleagues, I have been engaged in several research projects related to predatory publishing (see, for example: Oermann et al., 2016; Oermann et al., 2018). My succinct advice is to just stay away and don’t get involved as an author, peer reviewer, or editor.

CONCLUSION

As you contemplate starting a path toward becoming a nursing journal editor, make a firm commitment to do so in a way that sustains the highest standards of quality in the nursing literature. There is no fast or easy path to this end. Pursuing the necessary educational and work experiences are investments in yourself that will pay dividends when you achieve your goal of an editorship. A clear dedication to the quality of the nursing literature is a commitment that is vital to the integrity of published material on which significant clinical decisions are made.

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