Editorial: Maintaining Quality

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It is hard for me to believe that I am already in the fifth month of my tenure as Editor of the *American Journal of Neuroradiology*. A colleague of mine once said, "Time flies when you're having fun." I thought now would be a proper time to point out some changes in the Journal and why they have been instituted.

Our masthead now includes the names of members of an expanded editorial advisory board and a large list of special consultants to the editor. Although members of the editorial advisory board have been assigned a portfolio, they are not limited to reviewing articles on their particular subject. By the same token, many articles fall in several areas, so there will be some articles in the members' own categories that they may not review.

All articles, including case reports, are sent to at least two persons (members of the editorial advisory board, manuscript reviewers, or special consultants) for initial review and are then assigned to the Editor or a Deputy Editor for a final decision as to whether to accept or reject. Occasionally, the outcome might differ from the recommendation of one or more reviewers, but that does not imply that the reviewers' comments have been ignored. Instructions to reviewers have been rewritten, and I am pleased with the quality of reviews, especially from those who are doing them for the first time. Our manuscript tracking program records the quality, thoroughness, and punctuality of reviews. On the basis of this information, manuscripts will be assigned to reviewers with regard to past performance.

One reason for categorizing the editorial advisory board is to indicate to readers the variety of subjects on which we wish to receive manuscripts. I hope this will be a stimulus for neuroradiologists to broaden the horizons of their research efforts.

As the masthead shows, the editorial advisory board includes two physicists, Charles A. Mistretta, professor of medical physics at the University of Wisconsin, and R. Mark Henkelman, vice-president for research at Sunnybrook Medical Center, and a statistician, Peter C. O'Brien, professor of biostatistics at Mayo Medical School. Not all papers containing statistical analysis will be referred to the statistician. However, reviewers and editors may request this service in certain instances, particularly when an article makes an important statement about the relative values of particular products or techniques.

Three members of the editorial advisory board will have the prime responsibility for book reviews. They have been chosen for their fairness, writing skills, and experience in investigation and teaching. I expect these reviews to provide a lively forum.

Among our special consultants are certain individuals from disciplines related to neuroradiology. Martin Weiss, chairman and professor of neurological surgery at the University of Southern California School of Medicine, Louis Caplan, professor and chairman of neurology at Tufts University School of Medicine, Gunnar B. Andersson, professor and associate chairman of orthopedic surgery at Rush Medical College, and Peter Burger, professor of pathology, Duke University Medical Center, are highly respected in their own fields as clinicians, investigators, and editors, and they provide a ready source of expertise on which *AJNR* editors may call.

All those who review for the Journal have been asked to disclose confidentially the commercial support they receive. I hope to use this to avoid conflict of interest in assigning manuscripts.

Our table of contents is now subdivided to allow easy location of articles on a given subject. As I mentioned before, many articles could appear under several headings; therefore, assignment to a particular heading often will be somewhat arbitrary, but it will tend to be based more on age, anatomy, and disease rather than on technique of examination. The order in which articles appear in the Journal should not be construed as an indication of the significance assigned to them by the editors.

The Journal will publish news items and meeting notices that are timely, pertinent to neuroradiology, and national or international in scope. We have started a section, "ASNR Members on the National Scene," and we also will be publishing memorials for deceased members. From time to time, we will publish highlights of scientific meetings, including those of the American Society of Neuroradiology.

After much discussion, the editors decided that abstracts of the ASNR annual meeting and abstracts of articles from other journals should no longer be included in the *AJNR*. We believe that abstracts tend to be ignored by most readers, who concentrate instead on the major papers and case reports. The ASNR central office has agreed to send the book of the annual meeting to all ASNR members who do not attend the meeting so that they will have access to the abstracts presented there. Moreover, since abstracts do not undergo the same rigorous peer review as other manuscripts submitted to the Journal, it is not proper that they should be citable as having appeared in the *AJNR*. Those who wish to refer to abstracts in articles they submit to the Journal should do so under author guidelines applicable to unpublished data. Also to be considered as unpublished data are papers presented at meetings; these, too, should be cited parenthetically in the text rather than in the reference list.

A number of minor changes have been made in the *AJNR* author guidelines. To be certain that reviewers are not aware of the authors' identity, we have requested that acknowledgments appear on a separate page of any manuscript. We also ask that authors omit statements that would reveal their identities to the reviewers, such as mentioning the name of the institution at which the work was done. Authors may refer to their previous work but rather than use such statements as "Previous studies by our group have shown . . .," a preferable form would be "Previous studies have shown . . .," with appropriate references in the list at the end of the article. The editorial office will do its best to see that reviewers do not know the identity of authors, but it is impossible to read each paper in advance to detect statements that reveal authorship.

Letters to the editor should be no longer than two double-spaced typewritten pages, including references. In past issues of *AJNR*, this was stated on the letters-to-the-editor page; it is now also included in the author guidelines.

In May of 1989, I attended the Conference on Peer Review in Biomedical Publication sponsored by the American Medical Association. Several hundred people attended, including the editors of the major American and European medical journals. On the basis of information presented at that meeting, extensive conversations with editors of highly respected medical journals, and review of other journals' authors guidelines, I have proceeded with the changes outlined in this report. The changes may create some extra chores for authors and reviewers and, in some cases, make the processing of manuscripts lengthier. However, I have been charged with maintaining the integrity of the Journal, and I have made these changes with that goal in mind. The importance of these changes to achieving that end far outweighs any small inconvenience that might arise.

Michael S. Huckman
Editor