

Upon Further Review: Peer Process Vital to Publishing

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Peer review is one of the hallmarks of professional publishing and one that I appreciate every day in my work as editor of this journal. I simply could not do this work without reviewers, and all of my editor colleagues across the globe would agree. I have been a reviewer for various journals for many years, and now, as editor of the *Oncology Nursing Forum*, I am even more aware of how important my reviews are for others. Just this morning, I reviewed a manuscript—

for a noncompeting journal, of course—and as I entered my comments, I thought about what I, as editor, would find useful.

A perfect review, from my perspective as editor, primarily

addresses the content of the manuscript. I am not an expert in all areas of oncology nursing or research methodology, and I need help. The reviewers provide me with the expertise that I lack. I read every manuscript that is submitted to the journal. I try to do this the day it is sent to my inbox within the web-based manuscript management system that we use. Sometimes a pause occurs between an author submitting his or her work and it being sent to me. This is usually because one or more of the authors of the work have not completed all required forms. Once these have been submitted,

I receive an alert that a new manuscript is waiting for me. I really do enjoy reading all of these submissions. As you can imagine, my general knowledge about oncology has expanded rapidly in the three years that I have been editor.

The first question I ask myself is, “Is this manuscript appropriate for the *Forum*?” Despite the clear description of the mandate of this journal—to publish “manuscripts that focus on nursing achievements in the field of oncology including, but not limited to, clinical advances, research findings, educational developments, and role and theory development,” we are also interested in integrated syntheses of the literature pertaining to oncology nursing. We often receive work that does not meet this description. As the number one-ranked oncology nursing journal by impact factor in the world, I understand why prospective authors want to publish within the pages of the journal. But we are number one because we set high standards, and some submissions do not meet these criteria and I decline to send them out for review.

If a manuscript passes my initial review, it is sent out to three reviewers. Every reviewer has had the opportunity to identify the areas that he or she feels most qualified to review. I try to choose reviewers who are the best match for the content area of the manuscript, and they receive an email of invitation that requires them to accept or decline within three days. Once they have agreed to review the manuscript, they have 21 days

to complete this task—they receive reminders if they are tardy. We try to get the reviews done as quickly as possible. As an author, submitting a manuscript and hearing nothing back for months and months is extremely disappointing. I would love to have an initial decision on every manuscript within a month, and I try hard to make this happen. In the past year, making a decision to revise has taken, on average, 45 days, so we have work to do!

What I want to see in a review is a clear assessment of whether the manuscript moves the science of oncology nursing forward. I need to know if new and important evidence is presented and how this can be applied to improve patient outcomes. Is the methodology of the research sound and appropriate? Do the findings relate to the aims or purposes of the study?

Knowing if the authors have reported on the most relevant and recent research on the topic and how their findings support or differ from what is already known is helpful. Also, importantly, what are the implications for practice and research? We have recently altered the reviewer templates to help reviewers submit their reviews succinctly and in what we hope will be a helpful format. Time will tell on that one, and I hope that reviewers will tell us what they like and don't like about the changes we have made.

You may note that I have said nothing about grammar or spelling. This is the work of our copy editors, should the manuscript receive favorable reviews and be accepted for publication. A reviewer remarking that the manuscript was well (or poorly) written never hurts, but

the copy editors are the experts in grammar and spelling, and reviewers should keep their energy for a robust assessment of the content.

I appreciate the work of the reviewers far beyond the annual “thank you” that we publish in the journal. I frequently write letters for reviewers who request proof of their work for annual reviews, tenure and promotion applications, and other professional reasons. I hope they know how much I respect their work and that they receive personal benefit from this work. Reviewing multiple manuscripts has certainly made me a better writer and more critical reader. If you think you want to contribute to this work, send in an application to join the review pool, and let's put you to work (<https://onfons.org/content/join-peer-review-board>).