Point and Click

As you read this, the Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) Publishing Division staff and the Oncology Nursing Forum (ONF) Editorial Board will be about to wade into the biggest and most ambitious adjustment in our procedures since the journal was launched. This change will affect virtually every aspect of producing ONF. Changes will begin at the author level and continue through the peer review and editorial stages, finally culminating in the production process. It is a time of anticipation and some trepidation for all involved, but the changes ultimately will result in a system that will better serve each of us.

We had been flirting with the idea of converting to an electronic process on the front end of the manuscript continuum. For quite some time, the production processes—editing, layout, and transmission of copy to the printer—have been handled electronically, but as anyone who has published with us knows, the early stages of manuscript submission and review have been hampered by the need to mail, copy, print out, handwrite, shuffle, and type the paper and the forms needed to complete the process. About one year ago, we made a concerted effort to streamline these processes by shortening timelines and eliminating unnecessary steps. Even under the best of circumstances, the length of time it took for a manuscript to travel from the author to me to reviewers and back to the author was almost impossible to accomplish in less than two months and involved no less than 12 separate mailings.

At the same time that we instituted these changes, we began a serious search for an electronic solution. The ONS staff gathered information on a variety of programs that were available and investigated their advantages and disadvantages. Clinical Journal of Oncology Nursing (CJON) Editor Lisa Schulmeister, RN, MN, CS, OCN®, and I had conversations with other nursing journal editors to learn more about systems that many of them had “hand built,” so to speak, to streamline their work effort. Once we reached a confidence level that the majority of our authors and reviewers were comfortable with online technology, we concluded that we needed to purchase a prefabricated program and decide on a company that would offer us the best service.

That company, Scholar One, Inc., is a dedicated peer review company. Using a link from ONS Online, authors will initiate the process by uploading their manuscripts into the system. The system will walk authors through the process and notify them that their manuscripts have been submitted successfully. At the same time, an ONS staff member will access the system daily to check for new submissions. The editor will be notified via e-mail when new files are ready for review. I will access the system and the newly uploaded manuscripts and assess each paper’s appropriateness for peer review. The system will provide me with a list of reviewers with the right expertise to review each paper, and then I will assign the reviewers. Reviewers will be asked ahead of time via e-mail to facilitate the reviewer’s decision making.

Once a reviewer agrees to review a manuscript, he or she will be able to access the manuscript through the system, complete review forms online, and send them back to the editor. When all of the reviews are complete, I will convey my assessment to the author along with copies of the review comments. Revised manuscripts also are submitted via the system, and additional reviews, if needed, are processed using the same procedures employed in the first review. Finalized and accepted manuscripts become immediately available to the production and editorial staff for scheduling and processing.

As you can imagine, the learning curve for all of us involved in these changes will be substantial. We will begin by preparing detailed instructions for authors to guide them through the uploading process. Reviewers also will receive detailed instructions that will highlight the changes we have instituted in the way in which feedback will be provided. Human assistance will be available on weekdays during working hours for anyone having difficulty with the process. At this year’s ONS Congress in May, we will provide instruction sessions and hands-on practice for authors and reviewers. Once we get comfortable with the system for ONF articles, we will begin using the same procedures for CJON articles.

The system will be protected with access codes and security walls. Only the editor and selected staff members will have access to all areas. Authors will be able to access only their papers, and reviewers will access only the manuscripts assigned to them. However, authors can access the system at any time to check on the status of the reviews and reviewers can look back at previous review comments. Just about everything has been accounted for in this system. We will be able to adapt the many processes to our own needs and reconfigure the system, within limits, to conform to our procedures.

We hope to launch the system by March or April, and our goal is to have 75% of manuscripts submitted online by the end of the year. In the transition period, authors submitting manuscripts in hard copy will be contacted to ask them to engage the system and upload manuscripts. We will upload manuscripts from disks for authors who are unable to navigate the system. For a few months, we also will monitor both hard copy and electronic reviews to ensure that the electronic process is meeting the needs of reviewers, authors, and editors. I hope that, by this time next year, we will be wondering how we ever managed without electronic peer review and that I will be able to report a successful transition. This system will benefit us all, and I look forward to experiencing the changes together.