

EDITORIAL

AUTHORING AND THE PEER REVIEW PROCESS

I randomly chose three issues of three peer reviewed optometric journals that were published during the past two years. I did not include the *Journal of Behavioral Optometry*. There were a total of 42 articles in these issues. The purpose was to determine where the authors of these successfully peer reviewed articles were based. My categories were institutional and private practice settings. Institutionally based authors wrote 38 of these papers. These institutions included: national and international schools and colleges of optometry, schools of medicine, hospitals, the American Department of Veterans Affairs health centers and the United State's Indian Health Service.

I remember a time when more private practice based optometrists published in the profession's journals. And, another major vehicle in those days was the monthly papers published by the Optometric Extension Program.

There are several reasons that may explain the results of my admittedly unscientific survey. I propose that foremost is the emergence of the peer review system. This process began to take hold toward the last quarter of the past century. Prior to that time, a publication's editor was the primary, and often the only judge of a manuscript's worthiness for publication.¹ Peer review began to become an integral part of the publishing process for health related journals when it was endorsed by a group of biomedical editors in the early 1980s. These individuals produced the Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals, that has become the Bible for these publications.² These Uniform Requirements are updated on a regular basis by the

International Committee of Biomedical Journal Editors.

The peer review process has afforded editors a means to foster quality for their publications. The Uniform Requirements provide the guidelines for the process, and editors are able to tailor them within the context of the mission and culture of their publications. My observation is that the process has significantly improved the quality of articles published in peer reviewed optometric journals over the past several decades. This is in terms of the clarity, organization and documentation.

However, the peer review process is demanding. It requires a high level of knowledge of the article's subject area. The peer reviewers are deemed to be experts in that area. Gathering the knowledge entails researching that literature. Searches are now easily done on the Internet, where abstracts are increasingly available. However, the next step is to obtain the abstract's full article. And the complete article will often make reference to texts. Obtaining the original articles and the texts are most easily accomplished in institutional settings where the resources are generally readily available; it is far more difficult for the private practice based optometrist.

Further, publication in a peer-reviewed journal is greatly facilitated when the author has a mentor who has a successfully gone through the process. The mentor will nurture the author as the writing proceeds. Ideally, this entails organizing the article, using the correct format and documentation system, critically reading the finished product, and finally submitting it. Again, this is more likely to be

available in institutional settings, than in private based optometric settings. Nevertheless, there are optometrists in the private settings who do achieve publication in peer-reviewed journals.

Unlike their institutionally based colleagues, they are not tangibly rewarded, or even expected to write. I propose that these individuals write because they believe they have something to communicate that is of value to their colleagues. Two such individuals are the authors of the featured articles in this issue. The origin for both pieces came as the result of a clinical opportunity; one was to perform a visual screening on adolescent baseball players, and the other to perform complete optometric evaluations on Job Corps students. Both authors fashioned their projects based on their clinical experience and insights. I am pleased to take this opportunity to congratulate and

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encourage these and other optometrists take the time and effort to write, and successfully go through the rigorous peer review process. It is not an easy task; however, there can be a sense of accomplishment in transforming one's ideas and insights into something permanent.

References:

1. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peer_Review. Accessed 1/30/07.
2. The International Committee of Medical Journal Editors. The Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals. <http://www.icmje.org/index.html>.