

## **So, you want to start a new nursing journal? Stop, read this first.**

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Want to start a new nursing journal? Please: don't make our hearts sink! In our capacities as editors, as we travel around the world, we are often asked to advise a group - often an academic department or professional body - on setting up a new nursing journal. Indeed, a decision has usually been made to launch already with the assumption that we as seasoned editors will be encouraging and approving. We seldom are. Why?

Both of us have the privilege of working with large, credible mainstream publishers and we have both been the founding editors of a journal. One of us has many years with long-established journals. Our disapproval has nothing to do with competition or professional jealousy. Our mission, far from being self-serving, is to save eager well-intentioned people from themselves.

It isn't due to lack of enthusiasm or respect for those involved. Indeed, typically, the enthusiasm and optimism of these well-intentioned groups is palpable – but rather the sheer numbers and range of existing journals provide our first caution. Analysis shows that since journals came into existence in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, the number of journals consistently doubles every 15 years (Larivière 2017). The most reliable source of quality journals in nursing (“The Directory of Nursing Journals”) indicates (Pierson et al. 2018) there are now more than 250 active quality nursing journals in alone (Pierson et al. 2018) plus 150 to 200 predatory nursing journals of more dubious quality (Oermann et al. 2016). Taking the quality journals alone: these include every variation imaginable - from general nursing journals, such as *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, which are

broad and inclusive – to journals devoted to specialist topics, regions or theoretical interests, such as: *Biological Research for Nursing*, *Creative Nursing*, *The African Journal of Nursing & Midwifery*, and the *Online Journal of Issues in Nursing*. With such a rich and diverse selection of existing nursing journals, most incorporating online content and open access content, we muse why anyone would even perceive the need for any new journal. This is even before recognizing that nursing focused research can and should also be published outside of the discipline. Indeed, contributing to the on-going growth of journal options, many very well-established health-focused journals have differentiated to offer more open access and specialist journals - with the *British Medical Journal*, *The Lancet* and *JAMA* all now each offering over a dozen speciality journals (Bates 2017).

What then of the work involved? Establishing a new journal with the specialist help of even a large multinational publishing house is difficult enough. Colleagues wising to set up a new journal - often with limited or only departmental resources to support it - massively underestimate several key aspects of the endeavour.

First, there is the massive and diverse work involved in any journal - new or established - which those who have not edited will be blind to. Editing may normally be a part-time occupation integrated with your responsibility, but it is most definitely not a hobby that can be satisfied via periodic attention. Beyond the development of the journal's aims and scope, detailed submission guidelines have to be developed and revised regularly. Journals function in real time: new

manuscripts, reviews and revisions need to be processed in a timely manner as each arrives. Just finding one reviewer may take five or even ten requests to busy people who are slow to respond or don't respond at all. Authors, both potential and actual, will email with questions, requests, and feedback. All need a response - and not only when it suits the editor's work schedule.

Perhaps the actual work will be small or the tasks can be delegated? We have had people - eager to assume the prestigious mantle of being an 'editor' or 'editor-in-chief' - explain the role to us as: '*I don't expect to have to do any actual editing; I expect the reviewers will correct the manuscripts and that authors will have followed our guidelines anyway*'. In our decades of experience, neither of these things is true. Authors do not follow guidelines: most submissions are either somehow substantially incomplete or out of the journal's scope (Oermann et al. 2018). At the *Journal of Advanced Nursing (JAN)* - the highest cited academic nursing journal in the world and one of the longest established - approximately 50% of submissions are rejected by the Editor-in-Chief and many on the grounds of not following the guidelines. Catching these flawed submissions is not the reviewers' job: indeed, editors form the vital first defence to ensuring reviewers' precious time is focused only on reviewing papers that are considered suitable and complete.

Beyond this, each manuscript needs extensive detailed work and attention. Prior to being published with SAGE, the *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* was published in-house by the *International Institute for Qualitative Methodology (IIQM)* - even after peer-review, missing and repeated

words, and typos would have to be found and edited: most manuscripts are likely to contain these. Tens of citations in the reference section were incomplete or missing and citations in the text remained unreferenced. All have to be checked and cleaned assiduously. Finally, even the corrected word processed manuscripts have to be converted into a clean and consistent format for actual publication for readers. This included line-by-line proofing and editing of titles, sub-titles, direct quotations, headings, abstracts, figures, tables and key words. The workload was both gargantuan and highly detailed.

As well as managing papers, editors need to encourage submissions too. While submissions to a journal like *JAN* vastly outweigh what we can publish, if you are working on a new journal you need high quality submissions in sufficient numbers to just survive. Yet, the odds of attracting these are stacked against you precisely because your journal is new. Alas, many manuscripts you receive will have been rejected from other more established journals or report work that is unsuitable or not high enough quality for publication. You will need to work with prospective authors to improve English, presentation, readability, detail, and sharpen content. Raising awareness of your journal – let alone implementing an actual integrated marketing strategy - will take up more of your time. With few academics having a background in marketing, even a basic strategy will stretch your expertise and resources to their limits.

Most of these tasks fall on editors and simply cannot be avoided or delegated: a journal with no articles is no use and major efforts go into getting poor quality manuscripts to an acceptable state; even once they are readable,

the quality of the scholarship many be low. How will you feel about that and what help, if any, will you have to undertake the task? All this very hard work should be viewed against a backdrop of constantly being slowed by late or poor reviews because ensuring high quality reviews and reviewers for these papers is perilously time-consuming. You will receive and have to respond to the ensuing and understandable 'where is my manuscript?' emails from authors. Though editors are usually not culpable for delays, they are always responsible and accountable for them to authors and readers. And all this is before you have your first authorship disputes, plagiarism cases, and reports of duplicated articles to deal with. All of this is neither fun nor quickly resolved.

There is nothing easy about editing an established journal with a mainstream academic publisher. It is hard work - but work which you must want to do and enjoy. But with the strength of a good publishing house behind you, the difficulties are fewer and the hardships attenuated by having established and well-maintained systems, support and a wealth of specialist experience and resources to draw on. Without such systems, you will be tracking reviewers and manuscripts manually with some kind of old-fashioned filing system - either hard copy or electronic - or a public domain manuscript management system. These systems tend to be slow, *ad hoc*, and vulnerable to viruses, loss of backups and unwieldy to operate. Consequently, new journals simply cannot afford and cannot compete with publishers' systems such as ScholarOne, Elvise and SAGETrack. These provide invaluable support to editors and publishers to have an integrated 'one-stop shop' for submission, managing the review system, corresponding with

authors and exporting manuscripts to production. While none of these systems is perfect, they are luxury vehicles compared with any home-grown system.

Thereafter, the mainstream publishers have online platforms specifically designed to facilitate publication of and searching for articles.

This brings us to: how exactly you are going to publish your journal? Don't even consider hard copy – this is very expensive and economies of scale mean that you will have to find storage for large numbers of volumes of your own copies of the journal and those that will never be distributed....even if you can work out a cheap and efficient means of distribution and a cost-model of subscription. Of course, you will probably want to make your journal available online but even the most amateur predatory low-quality publishing companies – including the so-called 'predatory publishers' – will likely be able to set up a better online platform than you could yourself.

In your generosity and commitment to making scholarly work available, you will probably want to make your journal open access - you better, because nobody is going to pay to read it. If this is the case, then what cost model will you build? How will you fund any discrepancies? What criteria will you use to ensure fair article processing charges for the non-salaried, students, and people from low and middle income countries? How will you deal with questionable requests for waiving fees? By charging authors a small fee (you are not going to be able to compete and charge what, for example, BMC journals charge) but, with the best will in the world, you will then have difficulty distinguishing yourself from the predatory publishers (Eriksson and Helgesson 2017). We could go on...

So, if you have had an idea to establish a new journal and you have read all these cautions, but remain determined to proceed, we wish you the best of luck. One of us has been involved in establishing two journals with a major publishing house that have failed. That is dispiriting. On the other hand, we have both established successful journals and we must admit that it is a singularly enjoyable and satisfactory experience. Our best advice, however, if you want to be an editor is to seek experience with an established journal, speak to those with experience and if you have any doubts – don't!

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