

Our Electronic Year

Just one year ago, we launched our online manuscript submission and review system. Our high hopes for this system have been realized. Although it took some time for all of the participants—editors, authors, and reviewers—to become comfortable with its features, over the course of the year, we have managed to adjust our usual way of doing things to accommodate the changes. We have virtually 100% use of the system, with relatively few problems encountered along the way.

The first big change that is readily apparent is the speed with which we can conduct business. Submitting a manuscript to the journal for review used to involve approximately four months from the time the author mailed the first version of the manuscript until the time he or she received the first response to the review. Much of that time was taken up by the many manuscript mailings—first to the editor, then to the editorial staff, to the reviewers, back to the editorial staff, back to the editor, back to the editorial staff, and, finally, back to the author. Processing the paperwork and allowing time for the actual review accounted for at least six to eight weeks. Now, the whole process averages around 35 days.

A second big change related to our electronic conversion is the increased size and scope of our review board. Currently, we have more than 180 Oncology Nursing Society members who volunteer to review manu-

scripts online. They access the files electronically and input their feedback directly into the system. Their typed comments go directly to the authors as part of a letter that is prepared by myself when all of the reviews are submitted. This has given many more members the opportunity to participate in the process and demonstrate an incredible level of professionalism and skill.

Once manuscripts are accepted for publication, they are assigned to an issue and “held” in the system until the production schedule begins. Scheduling manuscripts for publication continues to be the one area where we still look for ways to improve. The current wait for publication in the print edition of the journal is 10–12 months. This is the case despite the fact that we are publishing 12% more manuscripts in 2004 than in 2003. This expansion has occurred in both the print and online exclusive versions of the journal. Although only a small number of authors is comfortable choosing the online exclusive format, we have seen an increased willingness to consider this option. Online exclusive articles offer a number of advantages, including an earlier publication date, the ability to track “hits” on a given article, and open access (i.e., they are not password protected). As with print articles, these manuscripts undergo peer review, are indexed in the standard databases, and can be downloaded for personal use.

With all of these advantages, however, come some drawbacks, which are not so much disadvantages as they are inconveniences. Electronic systems sometimes need time off for maintenance or, as we found out during hurricane season, are susceptible to unavoidable acts of God. And some authors and reviewers are more comfortable with the technology than others. Using the system requires up-to-date equipment, patience, and attention to detail. We have been able to supply support services to our users and troubleshoot when necessary. Lastly, those of us who have used the system will attest that giving up old and well-learned habits in terms of submitting and reviewing manuscripts is a chore, but once we got used to the new system, we wondered why we did not make the transition sooner.

Throughout the next few months, we will survey participants, update the reviewer information, and clear out extraneous files. We welcome applications from individuals who are interested in becoming reviewers and, of course, anticipate continued lively submission of manuscripts for review. 2004 marks our 31st year of publication, but we clearly remain open to new ideas and processes. These efforts keep our work fresh and exciting.

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