

Reflections of an Associate Editor: Tighter Scope, Tougher Standards, Making a Difference

From the perspective of an associate editor, compared to 5 or even 3 years ago, business has changed in a major way. With this statement, I am not referring to the altered mechanics of handling manuscripts by means of an electronic Web-based review management and publishing support system. Instead, I would like to point out significant external pressures that have an impact on the relationship between authors and the associate editor managing the peer review process.

Today, a greater number of submissions compete for the limited space in the 4 issues of the *Journal of Orofacial Pain* that are published annually, matching the situation encountered by other publishers in the field who are facing record numbers of manuscript submissions. The strain on the system is readily observable. Expert reviewers are swamped with manuscripts, not only from the *Journal of Orofacial Pain*.

It is no longer a rarity for a reviewer/associate editor to deal with a manuscript that was previously submitted to another journal—on occasion to more than one. If the authors addressed the issues raised in the prior reviews before submitting it to the journal, the peer review works best. If the manuscript is unchanged, I am often having to deal with an expert reviewer who no longer wants to see any work from the authors in question.

Although we would like to offer a fast turnaround of reviews, the burden on the system is real and unavoidable. For those authors submitting their manuscripts to other journals, the slowing of the peer review process must not have

escaped their attention. Maintaining or even increasing the journal's impact factor, which happens to be in the best interest of our authors, calls for the best available expertise. On the other hand, the demand on established expertise has become the bottleneck that controls the speed by which manuscripts are processed.

Some authors are surprised when their work gets an unfavorable review. Although they may have received glowing feedback for similar work just 4 years ago, increasingly, innovation, subject appeal, relevance, and timeliness enter into the decision making of reviewers and editors. Is the contribution sufficiently novel and significant? What is its citation appeal? Does it make a sufficient difference in terms of our current understanding? As a result, not all reasonable papers make the cut.

While we had a broader representation of papers on particular aspects of function of the masticatory system in the past, the title of the journal must have influenced the submission of manuscripts over the years, resulting in a tighter focus on pain in recent times. Other journals have picked up the body of work that deals with "stomatognathic physiology" unrelated to pain while we, the *Journal of Orofacial Pain*, have developed a tighter focus on pain and especially orofacial pain and related conditions than during the early years of the journal's existence.

Christian S. Stohler
Associate Editor