Evidence-Based Publications: Balancing Research Mission and Our Community’s Needs

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During the past several years, the American Osteopathic Association has been dedicated to enhancing the quality and content of the profession’s premier scholarly peer-reviewed journal. The JOURNAL is published monthly and distributed nationally and internationally and is also available online (http://www.jaoa.org).

The JOURNAL and its supplements have grown in size and number at the same time your Publications department continues to produce The DO and its supplemental publications, including the Whole Patient, AOA Health Watch, and Dialogue and Diagnosis.

My primary goal as AOA editor in chief is no secret: the AOA’s publications must enhance and encourage scholarly endeavors directed at advancing osteopathic medicine. This goal also continues to be the focus of the JOURNAL’s associate editors, Michael M. Patterson, PhD, and Felix J. Rogers, DO.

Most recently, with the assistance of the JOURNAL Editorial Advisory Board, we launched a new mission statement for THE JOURNAL. The JOURNAL’s mission, “to advance medicine through the timely publication of peer-reviewed osteopathic medical research,” is clearly expressed through seven goals. Taken together, these statements are an expression of our intentions and they serve as a guide to editors and peer reviewers when selecting manuscripts for publication.

In another attempt to accelerate the scholarly evolution of osteopathic medicine, we have decided to assign a high priority to the review and publication of systematic reviews and meta-analyses that are relevant to the art and science of osteopathic medicine. Our hope is that such articles will generate questions that stimulate pivotal research within our profession. As of August 2007, the JOURNAL began publishing calls for papers on topics relevant to osteopathic medicine (2007;107;326). We will continue to do so.

We have also been hard at work improving the peer review process at the JOURNAL, issuing our first call for peer reviewers earlier this summer. We encourage interested parties to submit a curriculum vitae following the instructions provided on page 455 of this issue. Contributions made by volunteer reviewers are acknowledged in print every January. In fact, this year, we were proud to announce the names of five peer reviewers who have served as consultants to the JOURNAL for 5 years running.

At the JOURNAL as at other biomedical publications, the importance of obtaining quality reviews cannot be overstated.

Part of our effort to stimulate research includes honoring the best original contribution published in the JOURNAL each year with the annual George W. Northup, DO, Medical Writing Award (http://www.jaoa.org/misc/northup_2007.shtml). All original contributions are considered for this honor, but the final process involves careful review and selection by the JOURNAL’s Editorial Advisory Board. This year, we are pleased to announce that this coveted award will be bestowed on Kate R. Meltzer, MS, and Paul R. Standley, PhD (see page 371). Their December 2007 article explored the effect of osteopathic manipulation on cellular mechanisms, specifically human fibroblast proliferation and interleukin secretion. Each year, the George W. Northup, DO, Medical Writing Award recognizes excellence in writing and scholarship and is presented at the AOA Annual Convention and Scientific Seminar. This fall, the Convention will be held in Las Vegas, Nev (https://www.do-online.org).

We also provide a forum for members of the profession to address controversial topics. While the JOURNAL has addressed for-profit osteopathic medical schools—a discussion that continues on page 366 of the current issue—and student debt, the DO has addressed changing the initials of the DO degree and issues confronted by gay, lesbian, and transgender DOs.

An important job of AOA publications is to facilitate thought and discussion among members of our community—not necessarily to identify specific solutions. We will continue to be vigilant in our pursuit of fair and balanced coverage of such topics so that members of the osteopathic medical profession and those that represent them are in a position to weigh all available information as they strive for just and enlightened solutions.

The AOA’s publications also continue to provide practicing osteopathic physicians with information intended to assist them in delivering high-quality patient care. Topics that have recently been addressed by AOA publications include: pain management, human papillomavirus, dyslipidemia, diabetes, and obesity.

We recently conducted a practice characteristics survey to identify the educational needs of primary care DOs. Respondents reported interest in several educational topics, chief among them were: pediatrics, including vaccination; electronic health records systems; nonpediatric vaccines; sleep disorders; and obesity.

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of “Information for Contributors” prior to embarking on their projects (http://www.jaoa.org/misc/ifora.shtml). This document has recently been recrafted to assist authors in developing high-quality manuscripts. Hyperlinks to additional resources have been added throughout. An abbreviated version of “Information for Contributors” can be found on page 456 of this issue.

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not mention the excellent abstracts that can be found in the current issue of the JAOA beginning on page 413. These abstracts represent the poster presentations that will be given at the 52nd Annual AOA Research Conference. Poster presentations will be provided by AOA research fellows, as well as osteopathic physicians, medical students and educators, clinicians, and researchers on the following general topics: osteopathic manipulative medicine and osteopathic principles and practice, clinical studies, basic sciences, and medical education and health policy. The efforts of these contributors clearly demonstrate the excellent research currently underway at osteopathic medical schools across the country. And yet, our highest priority remains the production of research with osteopathic relevance. It is this research that is necessary to drive our profession forward in the 21st century. I would ask each osteopathic physician to consider what he or she can do to support research in our schools and colleges.

References