

# Neurology<sup>®</sup> in 2021

## Progress Report

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### Correspondence

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By the time this editorial is published, it will have been a year since I began my term as Editor-in-Chief of *Neurology*. It has been quite a year. The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic led to millions of deaths and economic hardship worldwide; forced us to change the way we study, work, and interact with each other; and politicized science and scientific facts. At the same time, it showed how the scientific, medical, and public health community could work together to respond to the pandemic and, encouragingly, develop, test, and start administering several effective vaccines. Last year was a year of political, economic, and societal turmoil throughout the world. Every continent experienced severe weather events caused by a changing climate. In the United States, the killing of George Floyd led to a long-overdue national reckoning on race and racism that I fervently hope will lead to societal changes that address centuries of injustice. In addition, over the last 11 months, we witnessed 2 presidential impeachment trials and an acrimonious political campaign season that ended in a riotous insurrection.

Throughout these challenging times, *Neurology* continued to publish a weekly issue. I want to thank our dedicated team of editors, reviewers, and editorial staff for making this possible. I will highlight the state of the journal for our readers, authors, and editorial community, and to describe some of our plans for the future.

## Editorial Team, Editorial Board, and Gender Parity

For the first time in the journal's history, the core team of editors making decisions on manuscripts includes 6 women and 5 men. In 2020, in an effort to address systemic biases that have led to the underrepresentation of women in editorial leadership roles in medical journals, I worked closely with the other editors to achieve gender parity in our editorial board. We appointed 54 new members, bringing its membership to 127: 64 women and 63 men. Of note, 44% of the board is international. The increase in size and diversity broadens the breadth of perspectives and expertise (it now includes more methodology and topic experts) and accommodates the increase in submissions.

## Submitted and Published Papers

In 2020, 7,548 papers were submitted to *Neurology*, up from 5,396 in 2019 (a 40% increase). Last year, we published 2,034 manuscripts, a 7% increase from the prior year. To address a backlog of accepted research papers awaiting publication, we published an additional 70 research studies that required 985 online pages in 2020. The backlog of accepted papers has thus been substantially decreased and this will lead to faster publication times.

## COVID-19

The increase in submissions was partly due to the pandemic. Between March 1 and December 31, 2020, we received 950 papers with "COVID-19" or "SARS-CoV-2" in the title and published

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73. Some of these papers were invited editorials or commentaries; most were spontaneous submissions. Two of our spoke journals, *Neurology: Clinical Practice* and *Neurology: Neuroimmunology and Neuroinflammation*, received 257 and 290 submissions, respectively, related to the pandemic. We also created a COVID-19 minisite on our website to collect all the papers on the topic published in *Neurology* and the spoke journals as well as 43 blog entries describing the pandemic experiences of neurologists worldwide.

## Manuscript Processing Times

Despite the increase in the number of papers, processing times for manuscripts decreased in 2020, in large part due to the effort of the outstanding editorial office staff. The mean time from submission to a first decision on papers sent for review decreased from 53 days in 2019 to 44 days in 2020, and the mean time from submission to acceptance (including time undergoing revision) decreased from 157 days in 2019 to 125 days in 2020. We implemented a process to post the accepted version of manuscripts online before they are copyedited, making them indexable and available for readers an average of 7 days after they are received by the publisher (down from 22 days in 2019).

## Resident & Fellow Section

The Resident & Fellow Section continues to grow under the leadership of Roy Strowd, MD, as Section Editor, and Whitley Aamodt, MD, as Deputy Editor. The editorial team includes 20 residents and fellows (11 men, 9 women; 6 international). This year, 8 new members were invited to join the team after a competitive process for which we received 58 applications. In 2020, submissions to the section increased to 1,133 manuscripts from 815 in 2019, a 39% increase, and 62% were from outside the United States. Most submissions were case-based, but the section also handled a growing portfolio of educational research papers. The number of published manuscripts remained relatively stable, increasing to 180 from 168. Members of the Resident & Fellow Section are developing programs to develop the next generation of peer-reviewers, find innovative ways to use social media to disseminate work published in *Neurology*, and establish and expand different focus areas.

## Editorial Education

Last year, we began the Assistant Editor Program for early- to mid-career faculty at academic neurology departments to expose individuals to the academic editorial process earlier in their careers than has traditionally been done and to grow the next generation of editorial leaders. Jennifer Graves, MD, PhD, and Jonathan Graff-Radford, MD, will complete the program in April 2021. This year, we received 32 applications from highly qualified individuals to replace them, and by the

time this editorial is published, the new Assistant Editors will be in their new roles.

## Podcast

The *Neurology* Podcast continues to grow under the leadership of Stacey L. Clardy, MD, PhD, and Jeffery B. Ratliff, MD. In addition to the weekly podcast, their team created 17 special reports on COVID-19–related topics. The podcast episodes were downloaded 976,739 times in 2020. The number of downloads increased by almost 20% despite tremendous competition from other medical and neurologic podcasts.

## Press Releases

We increased the number of press releases from 4 per month to 6 per month in 2020, with wide coverage by the major news media, including NPR, *TODAY*, CNN, *Associated Press*, NBC, *New York Times*, and others.

## Manuscript Submission Process

We are simplifying the manuscript submission process and will no longer ask for formatting changes unless the manuscript is being revised after the initial external review process. To avoid asking authors to reformat their references to our own style, we will adopt the *AMA Manual of Style* reference format. At the same time, to promote greater transparency in research reporting, we will strictly enforce the requirement for prospective registration of clinical trials.

## Changes to Manuscript Categories

We have made some changes to the classification of papers in the journal. What follows is a summary of some of the major modifications, but we encourage prospective authors to review the Author Center for details.

- We will have a single category for research articles (such as clinical trials, observational studies, studies of diagnostic or screening tests, genetic risk prediction studies, economic evaluation studies, studies developing, validating, or updating a prediction model, and health outcomes research studies) that will also include all systematic reviews and meta-analyses. Studies previously considered for the Null Hypothesis section will now be published alongside other research studies in this category. If the question is interesting and important, and the methods are sound, we are interested in the paper regardless of whether results are positive or null. We do not have a “smaller scope study” category because we expect that the methods for all studies will be reported in detail.

- Clinical/Scientific Notes will be limited to case series and case reports that open new avenues of investigation.
- The Views & Reviews section has been renamed Reviews and will publish narrative reviews that are focused on clinical questions or place basic and translational research findings in a clinical context. Many of these reviews will be invited contributions, but authors interested in writing a review may submit a proposal describing the topic, focus, and organization of the proposed manuscript. Authors should include information on their search methods and include evidence published in the last 3 years.
- Contemporary Issues in Neurologic Practice has been renamed Contemporary Issues in Practice, Education, and Research, and will include articles that address issues relevant to the practice and training of neurologists involved in clinical care, education, research, or policy in the United States and internationally.
- We are introducing a new section called Research Methods in Neurology. The purpose of this section is to publish articles that describe the application of methods used in neurologic research. The target audience is neurologists doing research who need a primer addressing practical topics. This is not the venue for articles describing the first use or validation of a statistical, imaging, or other method, because those are better suited to a journal specializing in that methodology. We encourage authors interested in writing these papers to contact us to discuss the suitability and approach of the proposed manuscript.

## Plans for Next Year

In the coming year, we will continue to grow. We will increase the racial and ethnic diversity among editorialists, editorial board members, reviewers, and published authors, and monitor our progress by tracking demographic information that we will specifically collect for this purpose. We will continue to look for ways to simplify the manuscript submission process and shorten the time to make decisions on manuscripts. At the same time, we will improve the rigor of statistical and methodologic review of papers published in the journal and develop statistical guidance for our authors, reviewers, and editors. We will continue to promote greater transparency in research reporting and mitigate biases and conflicts of interest. I welcome comments, suggestions, and constructive criticism from our readers, authors, and reviewers to help us continue building on our success.

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