Emerging Subspecialties in Neurology: Becoming an Editor-In-Chief

Nara Miriam Michaelson, MD, AshleyElimar Aaroe, MD, Steven L. Lewis, MD, and Joseph E. Safdieh, MD

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Abstract

An Editor-in-Chief leads the editorial team and supervises the daily tasks required to prepare articles for publication while managing the overall content and style of the journal. To become Editor-in-Chief, one must have dedicated work ethic, close attention to detail, passion for the editorial process, and a keen ability to work with and give feedback to section editors and authors. For this article, we interviewed Dr. Steven L. Lewis, Dr. Joseph E. Safdieh, and Dr. S. Andrew Josephson about their collective experience of becoming Editors-in-Chief of Continuum, Neurology Today, and JAMA Neurology, respectively. We have compiled tips for aspiring medical writers and editors, based on their expert advice, to guide trainees in this potential career path.
An Editor-in-Chief manages a variety of daily responsibilities, such as screening manuscripts for acceptance or further revisions, suggesting ideas for journal design and article accessibility, creating content for website and social media, responding to questions from other editors and authors, and managing the overall content and style of each edition. Some start with publishing or directing medical education, whereas others serve as reviewers on editorial boards. In this article, we discuss how Dr. Steven L. Lewis, Dr. Joseph E. Safdieh, and Dr. S. Andrew Josephson became Editors-in-Chief of Continuum, Neurology Today, and JAMA Neurology, respectively. We summarize 3 approaches to becoming an Editor-in-Chief and outline actionable steps.

Steven L. Lewis, MD (Editor-In-Chief of Continuum)

Early Career Path
My path to becoming Editor-in-Chief of Continuum started with interests in both academic general neurology and medical education. My background in general neurology ultimately prepared me well to oversee a publication that covers the breadth of the field. Initially, my entry into publishing came with writing multiple-choice questions.

Positioning Oneself for Success
After years in private practice, I assumed a position in academic general neurology at Rush University Medical Center, and about 25 years ago, I attended a course at the American Academy of Neurology (AAN) Annual Meeting on how to write national board–style questions. This was moderated by Dr. Ralph Jozefowicz and 2 PhD experts in education. I expressed my interest, and exactly 1 year later, I received a fax inviting me to the next National Board of Medical Examiners (NBME) question writing meeting.

Seeking Opportunities/Mentorships
Through my experience writing questions for the NBME, I became a multiple-choice question writer for Continuum and ultimately served as an editorial board member and Associate Editor. When Dr. Aaron Miller, then Editor-in-Chief, retired, I submitted a proposal as a candidate to fill his position. One of the changes I suggested and ultimately made was to increase the number of core topics to 15 to ensure that no major topics were excluded in any 3-year curricular cycle.

Dr. Robert Gross, who was Editor-in-Chief of Neurology at that time, was a helpful mentor. As a fellow editor, he was able to suggest solutions to common and somewhat sticky issues that arose. I also found wonderful mentors in my editorial staff at AAN and my editorial board, including many affiliated topic experts.

Overcoming Challenges
When my very first issue as Editor-in-Chief went to press, I realized that a major dosing error had been made with an antiepileptic. Ironically, I was in clinic about to prescribe this very same medication to a patient when I discovered the mistake in a draft of the manuscript I had saved on my computer. I turned this lesson into an opportunity to create a new role of pharmacy reviewer for Continuum and enlisted a PhD clinical pharmacist to join the editorial board as additional quality control for all issues.

Joseph E. Safdieh, MD (Editor-In-Chief of Neurology Today)

Early Career Interests
My initial interest also started in medical education. I specifically try to use my skills as an educator to combat “neurophobia”—a general fear of neurology, which can be largely mitigated through how neurology is taught.

Positioning Oneself for Success
Interestingly, my path to editorship also involved writing multiple-choice questions, initially for Continuum with Dr. Lewis as Editor-in-Chief and for the AAN Neuro Self-Assessment Examination (NeuroSAE) program. I later became an Associate Editor for Self-Assessment and Continuing Medical Education and edited clinical vignettes for accuracy and clarity.

Seeking Opportunities/Mentorships
When the AAN put out a call for applications to be the next editor of Neurology Today, I applied thinking that I had very little chance of being selected. Previous editors were prominent chairs of neurology departments—both were also prior Presidents of the AAN—and I was still an early mid-career neurologist at the time. Nevertheless, I was motivated to bring Neurology Today into the 21st century with fresh ideas. My idea was to focus on making the publication more accessible in a variety of formats, including making the website more engaging and expanding its social media presence to platforms such as Twitter. I proposed that Neurology Today should also tell stories about neurologists themselves. I credit my position as Editor-in-Chief of Neurology Today to the skills I gained from being Associate Editor of Continuum and from the personal mentorship I received from Dr. Steven L. Lewis. Currently, 2 of my Associate Editors, Drs. Orly Avitzur and Barney Stern, serve as mentors as we work together closely and share ideas about various articles.

Overcoming Challenges
A preeminent neurologist once provided commentary on a pharmaceutical agent without acknowledging previous personal funding from the maker of the drug. The author’s connection to the funding was listed in a disclosure in another journal but not in ours, and we confirmed this by searching the Centers of Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) Open Payments.1 The neurologist further refused to admit the conflict of interest, but ultimately, we did what we felt was right and printed a disclosure on the author’s behalf. It can also be challenging to balance clinical and educational responsibilities with editorial ones. In addition to reviewing issue proofs on weekends, I set aside one-half day per week and use my commutes to work on Neurology Today.
S. Andrew Josephson (Editor-In-Chief of JAMA Neurology)

Early Career Path
My passion for editing developed through a focus on helping neurologists at all levels of training better understand cutting-edge research so that they could apply it to their practices. I personally found editing to be an exciting way to keep up with the literature and help with broad dissemination of ideas.

Positioning Oneself for Success
I gained some initial experience by serving as Editor-in-Chief of NEJM Journal Watch Neurology, where I realized how exciting it was to summarize papers to meet the needs of all readers, especially trainees in neurology. I was chosen to become one of a handful of Associate Editors of Annals of Neurology by then Editor-in-Chief Dr. Stephen Hauser. I learned first-hand how the editorial team is responsible for every article that comes in—ensuring that they are in proper format, sending them for review, or deciding to reject them—in addition to determining peer reviewers, collecting reviews, and communicating with authors. My time at Annals made me really fall in love with the idea of being an editor. After my term at Annals ended, the opportunity later arose for me to become Editor-in-Chief of JAMA Neurology.

Seeking Opportunities/Mentorships
I was fortunate to work at the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF) where the editors of Annals of Neurology were then based. Many of my colleagues, including Drs. Clay Johnston, Donna Ferriero, Bob Messing, Dan Lowenstein, and Jorge Oksenberg, were leaders in their own subspecialties and served as natural mentors to me. Each Friday, we would gather and spend 3 hours going over every article that was being considered for publication, passionately discussing methods, biostatistics, trial design, and article that was being considered for publication, passionately discussing methods, biostatistics, trial design, and article that was being considered for publication, passionately discussing methods, biostatistics, trial design, and...
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Appendix Authors

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Contribution</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nara Miriam Michaelson, MD</td>
<td>NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital/Weill Cornell Medical Center</td>
<td>Drafting/revision of the article for content, including medical writing for content; major role in the acquisition of data; study concept or design; and analysis or interpretation of data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashley Elimar Aaroe, MD</td>
<td>University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center</td>
<td>Drafting/revision of the article for content, including medical writing for content; major role in the acquisition of data; study concept or design; and analysis or interpretation of data</td>
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References