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

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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.

From the NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital/Weill Cornell Medical Center (N.M.M., J.E.S.), Department of Neurology; University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center (A.E.A.), Department of Neuro-Oncology; and Lehigh Valley Health Network (S.L.L.), Division of Neurology.

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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 ways to convey results most effectively and accurately. It was the most incredible and rewarding “on-the-job” learning, which, to this day, still influences my editorial approach.

Overcoming Challenges

One of the biggest challenges as editor is time management, specifically balancing this role with other important academic responsibilities, including serving as Chair at UCSF. My approach has been to block off a set amount of time each day dedicated solely to my editorial duties, which helps me balance my role as Editor-in-Chief with my other responsibilities in and outside of work.

Further Opportunities for Training

Publons is a website for researchers and editors that provides a free learning service called Web of Science Academy (webof-scienceacademy.clarivate.com/learn).² Courses include the following: An Introduction to Peer Review, Mentoring in Peer Review, and Coreviewing with a Mentor. After completion, trainees will receive a certificate and an opportunity to be invited to review articles. Trainees can also volunteer to review for any partnering journal based on their skill set. Coursera provides coursework in biostatistics and clinical trial design with certificates (coursera.org/learn/clinical-research).³ ResearchGate (researchgate.net)⁴ is another great platform for connecting with other clinicians and scientists and keeping on top of the literature. Join online networks in your field and associated subspecialty and reach out to editors. Apply to be part of the editorial board of the Resident & Fellow Section of *Neurology* to help with editing articles and creating web content for the blog.

Conclusions

Beyond the core qualities of leadership, diligence, timeliness, and a passion for knowledge, one must try to gain as much exposure to the publishing world as possible to become Editor-in-Chief. A range of pathways exist, from being a basic or translational researcher, to a general neurologist or a subspecialist, or to an administrator or educator. Regardless of the approach, one needs to demonstrate the skills needed to effectively work with other editors and authors, make editorial decisions, and supervise and manage the overall content of a publication. Several important themes, summarized further, can serve as practical guidance for trainees (Table).

Table Key Takeaways From Our Editors-In-Chief

1. Think outside the box. Sometimes, a fresh perspective is what is needed to take a publication to the next level. Don't be afraid to be yourself—bring your unique perspective and skill set to the table.	2. Put yourself out there. Keep an eye out for editorial positions. Respond to calls to serve as a Resident/Fellow board member of <i>Continuum</i> , a reviewer of the Resident and Fellow section of <i>Neurology</i> , or an Associate Editor of a journal. Offer to help with web content by contributing blog posts or podcasts.
3. Make connections. Attend national meetings and express your interests to like-minded individuals who can serve as mentors.	4. Think like a publisher. Cultivate valuable qualities such as timeliness, attention to detail, and a sense of what is important and valuable to your target audience.
5. Read (and write) voraciously. Keep abreast of the medical literature. Reading different journals can not only emphasize topics that are important and relevant to neurologists today but also afford editing and reviewing opportunities in your area of interest. Submit manuscripts frequently to various journals, including narrative medicine pieces such as <i>JAMA Neurology</i> “On the Brain” section or <i>Neurology</i> “Humanities in Neurology.”	6. Maintain your principles. Editors are responsible for the reliability of research and published news, which can influence physicians and patients on a large scale. Remaining principled and open-minded, with a fastidious attention to detail, is important on your path to becoming an Editor-in-Chief.

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Appendix Authors

Name	Location	Contribution
Nara Miriam Michaelson, MD	NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital/Weill Cornell Medical Center	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
Ashley Elimar Aaroe, MD	University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center	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

Appendix (continued)

Name	Location	Contribution
Steven L. Lewis, MD	Lehigh Valley Health Network	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
Joseph E. Safdieh, MD	NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital/Weill Cornell Medical Center	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

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