

My Life as an Editor - Ana Marušić



I became an editor more than 20 years ago, along with my husband and colleague, Professor Matko Marušić. I joined him and helped to create a successful journal for a small scientific community. The start of the journal coincided with the war in Croatia in 1991, which determined the scope of our interests. We focused on research related to war and disasters, from surgery and

psychotrauma to DNA phenotyping, as well as general issues in human health and social responsibility of medicine.

We worked hard with a team of young and dedicated colleagues from all over Croatia, and succeeded in creating a good general medical journal, the *Croatian Medical Journal*, which became the top Croatian periodical in terms of its scientific impact and contribution to the capacity-building for research in the community.

When we became journal editors, our research interests expanded and covered science communication and peer review topics. We studied authorship, and particularly the author contributions to research and manuscript writing. Our research reports were published in excellent journals, including the so-called Big Five general medical journals.

It is difficult to pick journals which were important for me as an author. I have published in large and small (influential) journals. Each of my articles had an exciting research question behind it, excitement with research results, and adventure of presenting them to the research community. While it is desirable to publish in large, high-impact journals, we should not forget that reaching the right audience and targeting the relevant journal are more important.

Your first teachers influence you most; the same is true in editing. My first contact with other editors was at the EASE conference in Budapest in 1994, where I met Sir Iain Chalmers. He was not an editor, but taught me the importance of study design and transparency of reporting. Ed Huth, the 'Dean of Medical Journal Editors' in the USA, taught me that editing is not an amusing hobby but a serious profession that requires continuous training and hard work.

At the very beginning of our work as editors, we realised that there is a great need for teaching authors how to communicate the results of their research and, more importantly, how to plan and perform research. We started with individual tutoring of our authors and expanded this to workshops for authors and researchers, as well as PhD courses. Eventually, we arranged a vertically integrated course for medical and allied health care students to teach research design, evidence-based medicine, and scientific communication. I like to call this work our public health outreach: preventing problems of authors by teaching prospective authors – health care students.

Journals are still the primary outlets for research in

biomedicine, but we live in exciting times of online publishing. And I would like to see full transparency of health research so that we can provide best health care to patients. Perhaps we should learn from other disciplines such as physics, where testing your research by publishing a manuscript in online platforms (arXiv database) prior to a journal submission is an accepted practice. Regardless of how the future shapes scientific publishing, editors will always be in high demand!

I sometimes joke that being an editor is a professional disability; you look for typing errors, inconsistencies, and weak conclusions everywhere, from shopping receipts (I wish I could correct them with red pen and return to the cashiers) to political speeches. Being an editor definitely helps being a better researcher by constant practice in critical thinking about research ideas and results.

The most challenging task for a new journal today is to prove that it is not just another open access journal seeking financial income. Demonstrating sustainability, quality and stability is not an easy task, and I am sure that it is not easy for indexing databases to identify what will be the best addition to their ever-enlarging collections. The indexing may be particularly problematic for academic and scholarly journals that are not affiliated to big publishers. These journals often have to distance themselves from numerous 'predatory' outlets. As the editor of the *Journal of Global Health*, a new open access journal, I enjoy creating its niche in the scientific world and testing publishing models for better communication of global health research.

My main advice to novice editors is to join editorial associations. Editing is a profession that requires skills outside research and academic work. A journal editor does not have to be an expert in computers and information science, but s/he has to be skilled in publishing, and especially in digital technologies. I remember how I had to learn the Digital Object Identifier (DOI) assignment, Extensible Markup Language (XML) encoding for PubMed Central, e-locators tagging instead of pagination, open-access publishing, endorsing Creative Commons (CC) licences, and other developments. All these are skills required for proper editing and publishing our journals.

The journals for small scientific communities should take advantage of digital publishing to improve their visibility and local as well as global influence. We are still thinking in terms of published articles and journals, number of pages in the PDF, and print-runs.

My advice to novice editors is to work hard, learn from others, and enjoy what you do. It may be a slow and challenging job, but it rewards those who are honest and have a vision and passion for their journals.

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