

My life as a (wannabe) editor – Rhianna Goozée



My route into science really began during a teenage love affair with the books of neurologist Oliver Sacks, whose writing inspired me to study Natural Sciences at the University of Cambridge. After a brief flirtation with potential clinical training and some valuable clinical experience, I found my way back to

science. I am now a final year doctoral student at the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology and Neuroscience (IoPPN), King's College London, studying the neurobiology underlying antipsychotic treatment response in psychosis.

I really enjoy some aspects of working as a scientist, but other aspects I find frustrating. Sometimes these overlap. For example, being at the very edges of what is known is thrilling but also disconcerting. As a researcher, I have also realised that I like to look at the “big picture” more than the minute, sometimes tedious, details. I like to see results, and enjoy communicating these to others. Inevitably, I have developed an interest in writing, editing, and communicating science.

After a talk at the IoPPN by Joan Marsh, Senior Editor of *The Lancet Psychiatry* and President of EASE, I approached the podium to ask about working at *The Lancet* and how she came to be an editor. Our chat led to an internship and so a few months later, I found myself in Camden, London, about to spend two weeks as an editor with *The Lancet Psychiatry*.

I have to admit that I expected employees at *The Lancet* to be slightly older, cerebral, and mostly male, working in a formal and somewhat scholarly environment. Therefore, I was pleasantly surprised by the diverse workforce, comprising a range of ages and experiences. I was also pleased to find that formality was not the norm. There was an openness in the team discussion of submitted manuscripts, and the meetings with Editor-in-Chief Richard Horton were actually fairly relaxed. The emphasis was not on formalities but on what was really important – science and medicine.

During my two weeks, I saw the processes from manuscript submission and pre-review, through editing, to page layout and deciding which articles were worthy of a press release. As a researcher, submitting papers for publication can feel like placing the hard work of many months or years into a black box, from which months later some sort of critical commentary emerges. Sitting with experienced editors allowed me a view inside the black box, and I saw what editors look for in a paper. It is easy to

be blinkered by daily exposure to your particular research topic, making it harder to be as critical of your own work as you might be of others'. Critical analytical skills are clearly foremost for an editor. I saw papers put through a process of tough criticism aimed at weeding out any potential faults, and seeing whether these were justifiable or redeemable. The process highlighted the importance not only of good design and a focused question, but also of clarity and transparency of reporting.

Another skill that I observed in the editors with whom I worked was their ability to aid authors to identify and narrate the story told by their research in a clear, methodical and engaging manner. They tried to discover the key message of the research and the implications the results might have out in the real world. Determining this makes it easier to decide what to include and what can safely be omitted, without compromising the impact or accuracy of an article. Editors play an active and highly important role, in concert with academics, in shaping scientific narratives, by determining not only what is published but also how the information is conveyed. Honesty and integrity are essential.

There was one aspect of the job that I had not previously given much thought. Usually, academics have worked for many years on the same topic, and may have pet theories that they are loath to have criticised. The ability to sensitively communicate criticism and rejection to authors is therefore a key skill, as is being able to direct and guide authors to make improvements based on the criticisms they receive. Producing an accurate and high quality manuscript can mean navigating the balance between the needs of the journal and the needs of the author.

Papers submitted to *The Lancet* that are considered for publication are generally of a high standard. One of the most rewarding aspects of my time was the exposure to so many interesting questions, debates, and pioneering results across a wide breadth of topics. This was a nice change from the more narrow focus that is required in academia. I liked that I could be reading about antidepressants in the morning and then hearing about gastro-oesophageal junction adenocarcinoma in the afternoon.

Has my two weeks as an intern inspired me to pursue a career as an editor? It's certainly encouraging me to consider it seriously. I was always concerned that leaving research would mean leaving behind just a little too much of the science that I love. However, I have seen that scientific knowledge is a necessary commodity for academic science publishing. Becoming an editor may allow me to maintain my connection with science, while providing the opportunity to apply critical, communication and creative skills across a broader selection of scientific fields. Whether I decide to stay in science or move to publishing, my two weeks as an editorial intern has certainly shown me the importance of editors in shaping science and in ensuring that important research findings are disseminated accurately, fairly, and in as transparent a manner as possible.