

## Reflections on the *Journal of the Medical Library Association*

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As we conclude our term as the editorial team of the *Journal of the Medical Library Association (JMLA)*, we have reflected on the goals that led us to take on the challenge of editing the journal. First and foremost, we wanted to contribute to the education of health sciences librarians and help to broaden the profession's skill set. The "JMLA Case Studies" column that the team inaugurated has played a role in doing so through putting forth a challenging question and leading readers through the processes of locating and summarizing evidence to address it. This month's case study broadens the focus to address a genetics-focused question dealing with supporting virology and evolution-related research and is contributed by an expert from outside Vanderbilt University.

In addition, the team actively solicited editorials from varied perspectives to ensure that a wide range of viewpoints and issues were addressed. Our term has seen editorials from hospital and academic medical center librarians, library and information science educators, and national library leadership, among others [1-4].

Our second major focus has been on continuing work to foster a research mentality among *JMLA* readers. To assess patterns in research publication, we completed a semi-systematic review of papers published in the *JMLA* from 2002-2007. Three team members independently examined articles published annually in the 2002-2007 time frame and categorized them as research (defined generally as a systematic investigation of a focused question with analysis and reporting of gathered data) or non-research. Research articles were further categorized by type (e.g., citation analysis, program evaluation, etc.). Research papers generally increased in proportion, constituting more than half of all papers published since 2003 and at least 60% of papers since the Eskind

Biomedical Library team's editorial tenure began in 2006 (Table 1).

Our efforts to continue to improve the quality and research focus of papers in the journal have necessarily resulted in a more competitive acceptance rate: the team's acceptance rate has consistently hovered around 50% (52% for 2007). While no editor enjoys turning away papers, we have been gratified to see that continuing growth in the quality and breadth of the body of health sciences literature allows increased discernment in assessing papers for publication.

In the process of working with authors to improve the quality of submissions, we have also been able to improve our own workflow. In 2006, we reported that authors submitting papers received an initial decision and comments in less than 1 month following submission and peer review approximately 55% of the time. In 2007, the turnaround rate improved such that these initial decisions were delivered in less than 30 days 72% of the time.

Of course, much of the work of the *JMLA* depends on the dedication of our volunteer peer reviewers. We have been privileged to work with many talented reviewers and associate editors over our term and thank them all for their contributions to the *JMLA*. We particularly thank those reviewers who addressed the largest volume of manuscripts over the past three years for contributing their time and expertise.

We must also thank the Medical Library Association (MLA) publications staff and leadership for

their assistance and dedication to a high-quality journal and, of course, the readers of the *JMLA* for your encouraging comments on the changes in the journal. We also thank the authors who submitted papers and graciously worked with us through the revision process. The journal, and ultimately the profession, thrives on your interesting ideas and thoughtful investigations into ways to improve our services.

In our work with authors to help clarify elements of papers, we have been struck by the number of authors who have expressed their deep appreciation for this kind of mentorship and opportunity to collaborate with other writers. While some libraries undoubtedly have supportive mentoring cultures and promote such collaboration, providing a forum for volunteer mentors with demonstrated expertise in research and scholarly publication to interact with authors seeking mentorship might be a useful idea for an organization like MLA to pursue.

Working with the journal has provided us a wonderful opportunity to develop our own skills and knowledge, and we have appreciated the opportunity to learn from the thought-provoking conceptions and hypotheses that *JMLA* authors have developed over the last three years. The *JMLA's* new editor, Susan Starr, former associate university librarian for sciences and scholarly communication at the University of California, San Diego, brings with her interesting ideas about further developing the journal's electronic

**Table 1**  
Research papers published annually in the *Journal of the Medical Library Association (JMLA)*, 2002-2007

Year	Count (research papers/all papers)*	Percent
2002	23/48	48%
2003	31/51	61%
2004	30/53	57%
2005	34/64	53%
2006	50/72	69%
2007	37/62	60%

\* Denominator includes only full and brief communication papers.

content and position as a vehicle for knowledge sharing and mentoring. She noted in her application:

[The *JMLA's* editor] will be well positioned to exploit the power of electronic delivery to strengthen the online *JMLA* by adding features and additional content. We should be as proud of our journal in its web incarnation as we are of the print vehicle. However, the move to electronic publishing is not without its challenges. In the online era, individuals increasingly only go to the literature when they have a particular problem to address, rather than regularly scanning the content of the key journal in their field. The user focuses on individual articles on a particular topic, wherever they are published, and the value of the journal as journal declines. Unfortunately, though understandable, this behavior causes individuals to miss much in the literature that could assist them. One challenge that the new editor will face is to develop tools and techniques that will assure that our members

continue to access the knowledge-base that the *JMLA* represents.

The *JMLA* serves as a useful tool for addressing these and other issues related to information and communication, and as the new editor develops the *JMLA* further, we look forward to continuing to learn from the insightful thoughts conveyed in it.

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