

# Should you “just say ‘no’”?

Stephen B Hanauer and Julie Solomon

Like everyone else, doctors today are busy. In many cases they're trying to balance having a private life with treating patients, teaching students, conducting research, managing finances, attending meetings and keeping up with the literature. So when it comes to taking on extra work, such as peer-reviewing an article, or even writing one, many of us would just say 'no'. Is that the right response, though? If charity begins at home, what about education? Do we have a responsibility to contribute to improving the knowledge base of fellow physicians and upcoming students, or can we feel justified in a decision to 'let someone else do it'?

We all have a duty to contribute—after all, the Hippocratic Oath says we should. “I swear to fulfill, to the best of my ability and judgment, this covenant: I will respect the hard-won scientific gains of those physicians in whose steps I walk, and gladly share such knowledge as is mine with those who are to follow.” In this light, can we confidently refuse to make our own small contribution?

There are two main ways in which you, as physicians, can fulfill this aspect of your oath. One way is by writing articles on topics that interest yourself and that would be interesting and useful to other gastroenterologists and hepatologists. The other way is by acting as a peer-reviewer of those articles. We are sure that many readers would say that their time is better spent on other things. Acting as a peer-reviewer, however, gives you the opportunity to act as a quality-control expert,

**Your experience and expertise have been called on, and you could make a difference to the lives of patients around the world.**

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#### **Competing interests**

SBH declared competing interests; go to the article online for details. JS declared she has no competing interests.

www.nature.com/clinicalpractice  
doi:10.1038/ncpgasthep0058

ensuring that your own expertise is taken into account before an article is published. Your opinions could influence the practice of thousands of physicians world-wide, just like their opinions influence your own. Of course that's what *Nature Clinical Practice Gastroenterology & Hepatology* aims to do—improve patient care by providing expert guidance on best practice.

It's easy to underestimate the impact that an article can have. Articles that are poorly peer-reviewed and edited have a negative impact on patient care: they're difficult to read, difficult to understand, and their practical implications can be difficult to determine. All of this, of course, means that the articles don't make an impact. The converse, of course, is that articles that have undergone an intensive peer-reviewing and editing process are useful—both to physicians and to the patients those physicians treat. Articles that are clear, concise, timely, accurate and (of course) interesting make the physician's job easier and more pleasant, and can improve the physician's interaction with his or her patients. Wouldn't you like to be involved in making all this happen?

You *can* be involved. The next time an editorial office contacts you, be it *Nature Clinical Practice Gastroenterology & Hepatology's* or that of any other journal, think about the contribution you could make before declining the invitation. Your experience and expertise have been called on, and you could make a difference to the lives of patients around the world. Wouldn't that be worth a few hours of your time?