

## EDITOR'S PAGE

### Spinal Cord Editor's Page March 2008



Dear *Spinal Cord* reader,

I thought now was the right time to describe to you the reviewing and editorial decision process we use at present.

As you are aware, when a manuscript is submitted to *Spinal Cord* it arrives as an online file containing every component that is requested in the instruction to authors.

A first check is made concerning word count, completeness of the submission and possible conflicts of interest. If there are uncertainties, clarifications are requested from the corresponding author. The standard word count depends on the type of manuscript—review, original work, case report and so on—and we try to be rather strict on this, but some flexibility is allowed if the author provides a valuable argument as to why a slightly higher word count is required. After this initial evaluation, the editorial secretary proceeds the manuscript to a folder named 'awaiting reviewer assignment', and this is where I pick the manuscript up. I read it through and decide if it can enter the review process: manuscripts that are not original, describe a study with severe scientific methodological problems, or are on subjects unrelated to spinal cord and the scope of the journal will not be peer-reviewed.

Most manuscripts will be sent for peer-review, and the number of reviewers assigned to them can vary from one for a simple case report to four for a manuscript on a controversial topic. Most will have two or three reviewers. The choice of reviewers takes time, as we want them to give specialist and well-founded advice, mainly on the scientific value, but also on the practical value—the need for editing, the possible shortcomings in the conclusions, the relevance toward what has been published before.

As soon as reviewers have been chosen, the manuscript enters the 'contact potential reviewers' folder and from there I send out the invitations to each reviewer. The invitation letter includes the manuscript abstract and provides information on the time frame of the review process and the way to submit the recommendations. The reviewer can accept or decline. If there is no reply or a reviewer declines, the manuscript automatically moves back to the file 'awaiting reviewer assignment' where new reviewers are appointed. As soon as the required number of reviewers have accepted, the manuscript moves to a third folder named 'manuscripts under review'.

The most important stage—the decision—occurs when all comments have arrived. Guided by the suggestions of the reviewers, and often the assistant editors, I decide whether a manuscript should be accepted as is, or accepted after major or minor revision, or if it should be rejected. The corresponding author receives an e-mail containing the decision and including the blinded comments of the reviewers on which the decision was based. If authors decide to make the revisions requested they can, when finished, resubmit. Such revised manuscripts enter the review process again and will be reviewed by the same or supplementary reviewers. Most reviewers provide great detailed comments, which helps a lot. You can see that many are involved between submission and publication.

In this issue, many interesting studies are presented that have successfully gone through the review process. I hope you will find them to your liking. Knowing the long process through which they have gone, will perhaps cause you to look at them differently. If our system is good, this will be shown by the end product, and that is for you, the *Spinal Cord* reader, to decide.

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