

The *CMAJ* Editorial Fellowship: a different kind of fast track

Eric Woollorton

Writing in a collection of essays on *The Future of Medical Journals*, Sir Christopher C. Booth describes the arduous path that led him to become editor of the journal *Gut*. This path, which began with work at a medical student journal, wound through years as a clinician, researcher and academic and, in time, author of peer-reviewed papers. He was eventually invited to be a peer reviewer, then to join an editorial board and, ultimately, to accept the rare honour of the editorship of a major journal.¹ The assumption of an editorial role relatively late in one's career, typical for many journal editors, is by no means universal (as the example of *The Lancet's* current editor shows). But it is safe to say that becoming the editor of any major journal is not an easy career goal to plan for. Like many interesting opportunities, it arises from a confluence of ability, readiness and circumstance that can be difficult to anticipate. If ability and circumstance are mainly matters of chance, then how does one acquire the necessary readiness?

Although, in journal publishing, the term "fast track" refers to an accelerated process of peer review and publication for particularly time-sensitive or important research, it could be used to describe the Editorial Fellowship at *CMAJ*. The year-long Fellowship offers newly minted physicians involvement in editorial activities that they would not normally be exposed to until much later in their careers. Based in Ottawa, the Fellowship runs from July of one year to June of the next. Acting as a scientific associate editor, the Editorial Fellow reviews submissions, corresponds with authors and works closely with the senior editorial team to voice opinions and address current clinical and policy issues. The fellow also works closely with other journal departments, including news, production and online publishing. The position offers interactions with policy-makers at institutions such as Health Canada and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research. A leadership role is encouraged in special projects such as theme issues and series, along with participation in conferences and, at the University of Ottawa, academic enrichment through coursework.

On the various occasions when I have sat on medical school admissions committees, I have never come across an application letter written to the tune of "The reason I want to go to medical school is to become a journal editor." For physicians who entered medicine to become clinicians, the appeal of temporarily "sidestepping" medical practice and entering the world of medical editing may not be obvious. However, several aspects of the *CMAJ* Editorial Fellowship can make this opportunity seductive, even for physicians with

a strong clinical inclination. Among these is the opportunity to stay abreast of a broad range of medical topics and to influence, in some small way, how medicine is practised. Now in its 90th year of publication, *CMAJ* is highly ranked² and honours the more than 300-year-old "heritage of diversity"³ of general scientific journals, publishing research papers of high scientific quality, originality and clinical relevance from a variety of medical fields. For a clinically inclined *CMAJ* Editorial Fellow, there is a distinct satisfaction in helping to disseminate useful information that both reflects and helps to shape important trends in clinical practice.

Perhaps the greatest advantage of being an Editorial Fellow is the opportunity to become a better reader and, ultimately, a better writer. As Ernest Hemingway put it, "The most essential gift for a good writer is a built-in, shock-proof, shit detector. This is the writer's radar and all great writers have had it."⁴ By using an editor's flight instruments, one learns how to be a more skilful writer. And developing critical appraisal skills in assessing the work of others will help prime the Editorial Fellow to practise evidence-based medicine, to plan well-designed research projects and to present findings more effectively.

The Editorial Fellowship offers clinicians a fast track to highly relevant and personally enriching experiences that others have earned throughout entire careers. If you are interested in the challenge, submit a curriculum vitae and letter describing your interest by Dec. 31, 2001, to Dr. John Hoey, Editor, *CMAJ*, 1867 Alta Vista Dr., Ottawa ON K1G 3Y6. Further information on the Editorial Fellowship and profiles of former Editorial Fellows can be found online at www.cma.ca/cmaj/fellowship.htm.

Dr. Woollorton is *CMAJ's* Editorial Fellow for 2001–2002.

Competing interests: None declared.

References

1. Booth CR. A clinical scientist among the editors. In: Lock SP, editor. *The future of medical journals*. London: BMJ Books; 1991. p. 11-20.
2. *CMAJ's* impact factor improves. *CMAJ* 2000;163(9):1182. Available: www.cma.ca/cmaj/vol-163/issue-9/1182b.htm
3. Morgan P. *An insider's guide for medical authors and editors*. Philadelphia: ISI Press; 1986.
4. Ernest Hemingway [original interview published in *Paris Review*; 1958]. Plimpton G, editor. *Writers at work: second series*. New York: Viking Press; 1963.

Correspondence to: Dr. Eric Woollorton, *CMAJ*, 1867 Alta Vista Dr., Ottawa ON K1G 3Y6; fax 613 565-5471; eric.woollorton@cma.ca