

A Memoir of a Sojourn as Editor of *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*

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I am delighted and honoured to be part of the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the publication of *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*. It is also an honour to accompany the recollections of former editors Fred Lowy and Quentin Rae-Grant.

One of my enduring memories of my time as editor was the assistance that I could call on from members of the Canadian psychiatric community, the Editorial Board, and the previous editor, Fred Lowy. My time as editor, which spanned more than a decade and a half, was a period of activity, work, and fulfillment.

Let me first discuss the structure of the *Journal* and its relation to the Association as it was when I started and as it was when I left. To begin with, the editor had full control over what happened at the *Journal*: a glass wall existed between the *Journal* and the Association, although both bodies occupied small offices in an area about the size of a 1- or 2-bedroom apartment on the ground floor of a small apartment house-cum-office building in the centre of Ottawa. I must point out that the Association itself was still quite young and feeling its way, numbers in psychiatry had not yet begun to swell, and the place of psychiatry in medicine was still being worked out and was often felt to be problematic.

Where editorial issues were concerned, the relation between the *Journal* and the Board was always cordial and respectful. That is to say, the Association never took any sort of proprietary approach to material published in the *Journal*. The Board chair at the time was Stan Greben, and he always respected our autonomy. Next in line were the managing editor of the *Journal* and the executive secretary of the Association. A certain amount of jostling went on as to whether the Association's executive had a supervisory position vis-à-vis the *Journal*. However, this never affected the editorial process. My predecessor, Fred Lowy, gave me several insights into the relation between the *Journal* and the Association.

Fred told me that, despite any disputes with the Association, there was never any attempt to influence the *Journal's* direction, policy, and decisions. In all the years during which I was associated with the *Journal* and the Association, this continued to be true—which is not to say that this relatively hands-off policy kept the Board chair, the president, other members of the Association, and the executive director from giving advice. Moreover, that advice was almost always positive.

In addition to our managing editor, we had an assistant who acted as a copy reader as well as a secretary. There was also a book review editor who was chosen from Ottawa because of the need to visit the office and assign book reviews.

When I began my tenure as editor, the *Journal* dimensions were less than three-quarters those of the current publication, and there was little variation in the cover colour. No headlines appeared on the cover, which was, as I recall, a conservative grey. The matter of the publication's size preoccupied the creative efforts of the editor, the managing editor, and the printing house. The current dimensions were finally adopted to position the *Journal* as a contemporary journal. With a change in dimensions, its appearance became more consistent with that of other evolving journals. The increased size also improved the readability of figures and tables. As well, the name was changed. *The Canadian Psychiatric Association Journal*, *La Revue de l'Association des Psychiatres du Canada* became *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, *La Revue Canadienne de Psychiatrie*. The name change was accomplished without any difficulty and introduced at the beginning of the publishing year.

In time, cover space was used to identify and highlight an issue's articles and themes; small changes followed in accordance with evolving trends in the field of publishing. For a long time, a big problem was the need to have the *Journal's* cover appear in consistent colours from issue to issue; for

some reason this was not an easy task, but eventually, standardization was achieved.

For several years, the Association and the *Journal* staff were preoccupied with the cost of publishing, which fortunately remained relatively stable. It then became necessary for us to develop some business sense to understand the variations in the availability and price of paper; eventually, we stabilized this element by putting contracts for printing out to tender. As time passed, the *Journal* took on a more and more business-like approach, especially with the advent of the Association's current administration.

For the editor, an important element of the job was that it yielded an intimate knowledge of the role and functioning of psychiatry in Canada. The position offered a bird's eye view of what was happening in the field, gained both formally and informally. Formally, the editor was present at meetings of the Board of Directors, which provided first-hand knowledge of the structure, operation, and individuals involved in maintaining the organization of psychiatry in Canada. It also helped that most editors held major administrative positions in a department of psychiatry. (In all cases, they were the chairs of a university department of psychiatry.) This role gave the editors a more informal opportunity to connect with their colleagues across Canada and to acquire an understanding of the people, the directions, the goals, and the missions of individual departments; further, it permitted the editor to call on appropriate colleagues when seeking assistance to review *Journal* papers.

The problem with obtaining reviews came to a head in the early 1990s. The pace of publication had been leisurely, and the time from submission of a paper to its review, acceptance, and eventual publication was at least 1 year, which seemed to be in keeping with the norm for other journals. Then, with technological advances in terms of word processors and fax machines, the pace quickened, and our contributors began to demand more rapid publication. As in many other things, we were able to adjust to this change.

Being editor also gave me an entree into meeting the editors of other important journals. I got to know the senior administration of the American Psychiatric Association, and on trips to England, met with the editor of the *British Journal of Psychiatry*. Twice in my tenure, I took sabbaticals during which I established close relations with 2 other psychiatric journals that also served a smaller community of psychiatrists. The *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* (with which we have a friendly rivalry) is in many ways our

companion journal. I also connected with the *Hong Kong Journal of Psychiatry*.

I always made an effort to have significant articles appear in the *Journal*. To do this, however, the *Journal* had to have a significant impact on the field, so that publishing with us could bring recognition to the author. Canada has many highly prominent, effective, and productive psychiatrists and researchers, some of whom feel that publication in a more prestigious journal is important, both to advance knowledge and to help them be recognized by their own university. For a long time, both the editor and the Editorial Board were occupied with the question of how to propel the *Journal* into the appropriate niche to satisfy readers both at home and abroad.

It was never difficult to obtain articles that identified the beginnings of research or articles that described Canadian psychiatric practice and organization. What were harder to obtain were truly scientific articles, particularly those that would be cited by authors from other journals. The collection of data on citations is the responsibility of the Institute for Scientific Information, which publishes a journal called *Current Contents*. At the end of each year, this organization summarizes statistics concerning the readership and citation of journals and journal articles. The most important number is the impact factor, a ratio reflecting the number of citations in other articles (with an added stipulation that no more than 20% of citations could be self-citation by the author of the article).

The impact factor of *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry* hovered around 0.3 for many years, whereas other journals, such as the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, had an impact factor around 1 and the *American Journal of Psychiatry* and the *British Journal of Psychiatry* had impact factors of 4 or 5. The highest-impact medical journals were the *New England Medical Journal* and the *Lancet* (which reached stratospheric heights).

Because of our relatively low impact factor, publication in the *Journal* had a reduced effect on applications for promotions in the departments. Moreover, because the "scientific" articles were relatively few in number, the *Journal* was placed among journals that were categorized as lying more within the social sciences than in medical science.

Thus a vicious cycle developed that only began to change in very recent years, as the nature of publications changed and the requirement for evidence-based research was accepted. The *Journal* now has an impact factor greater than 1 (it was 2.071 in 2003), a target that, despite all my efforts, we could

never reach. Another way of ranking the *Journal* is to look at its rank in the range of psychiatric journals as a whole, given its impact factor. Here it is somewhere in the middle.

With the easy availability of information offered on the Internet, the quality of articles in journals has gone up generally. However, scientific articles are still the most important and are the ones picked out by various reviewing organizations that supply information to the psychiatric, medical, and mental health professional readerships.

One of the events during my term was a successful negotiation with the child psychiatry group. Their burgeoning numbers and increasing importance had a great impact on the entire field of psychiatry. Since child psychiatry brought a greater understanding of adult psychiatry through developmental research, this group naturally wanted to present these advances to the psychiatric community. A strong drive developed to create a separate publication for child psychiatry alone. With the wise counsel and the diplomatic skills of my successor, Quentin Rae-Grant, we negotiated an agreement that, each year, one issue of the *Journal* would be devoted to child psychiatry. A committee and guest editor from the child psychiatrists' organization would be appointed, but final approval for publication would come from the *Journal's* Editorial Board. This plan proved successful and led to other dedicated issues focusing on forensic psychiatry and psychosomatic medicine. The *Journal* also published occasional supplements. In relation to these supplements, we had to steer carefully around any shoals: editorial decisions were to be made by our Board, not by industry. This proved not difficult to implement, but as a result, it was difficult to obtain appropriate supplements, some of which would also have contributed to meeting the *Journal's* operating costs. However, the need to stick to principle always won out in our deliberations and rules.

Another area during my term was a relatively unofficial policy of trying to encourage beginning Canadian authors to make submissions. Often, these submissions were inadequate; however, diplomatic correspondence with the authors helped and encouraged them to revise their articles and resubmit improved versions that were frequently published.

Thus the *Journal* fulfilled several important functions in Canadian psychiatry during my term. The publication reflected the seriousness of the Canadian Psychiatric Association and its dedication to academic and clinical advancement. It was also a learning ground for authors who first published in it. I was always proud of the fact that *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry* was known throughout the world and was not seen

as obscure. I also took pride in the fact that, with the help and advice of members of the Board, it was possible to build the structure of the *Journal* so that it could continue to grow in directions that were appropriate for the time. I look at the *Journal* today and continue to feel a sense of affection and kinship.

In thinking about this memoir, I had occasion to look at my first editorial, written when I took over the editorship in 1977 (1). I am pleased to say that much of it still stands as a good mission statement for a psychiatric journal. What has changed are some of the issues affecting our profession and the concepts we use.

I would like to end with some quotes from that first editorial, as well as from the last editorial I wrote, in 1995 (2). The February 1977 editorial, entitled "Changing of the Guard," read

An established scientific journal, such as this, has a responsibility to reflect to its readership, the state of development, practice and activity of the discipline and profession which it serves. The editors are the custodians and guardians of this tradition in transmitting what is best, what is new, what is useful and what is stimulating in the field of psychiatry, particularly in Canada, and to maintain a quality that is of an international standard (1, p 1).

The editorial ended "To be the forum and the vehicle for the exposition of psychiatric knowledge and practice will continue to be the goals of the Editor and his associates" (1, p 2).

My last editorial, published in September 1995 under the heading "A Fond Farewell," noted that in 40 years of the *Journal's* existence, I was retiring as its third editor and Quentin Rae-Grant was taking over as its fourth editor. One comment that I'd like to quote is

The practice of biopsychosocial psychiatry, always the dominant approach to treatment in understanding in this country, has undergone gradual transformations. Not so many years ago it was still necessary to persuade psychiatrists practising psychotherapy to prescribe appropriate drugs. As more psychiatrists are becoming increasingly more psychopharmacologically knowledgeable, it is equally important to persuade them to treat and prescribe psychosocial approaches. There is, and will be, increasing efforts to describe and explain what are coming to be seen as integrated approaches to treatment that provide a true biopsychosocial approach. It is hoped that this will reduce the polarization that frequently affects our field (2, p 366).

In my introductory editorial, I had noted that it would be the *Journal's* role to reflect the evolution of Canadian psychiatry and to do so in an informed way while maintaining the high standards expected of serious journals. I will have to leave it to readers of this journal past, present, and future to decide whether this was appropriately carried out.

For myself, the journey was one of great value and enjoyment; it put me in touch with individuals and the field that I have loved and worked in for many years. Celebrating the 50th anniversary of this journal has allowed me to relive many of these wonderful moments. I wish *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry* many more years of success and look forward to deriving pleasure and knowledge from reading it.

Joel Paris, who was a great help to me and to other editors in the past, now takes up this task. Given his past record in many fields, he will be an excellent leader.

References

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