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The Importance of Peer Review

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Many times I am asked what it means to be a "peer-reviewed" journal. After all, many journals and magazines claim to be peer reviewed. What makes ours different?

Recently I joined an organization called the World Association of Dental Editors (WAME). I found out about WAME from a medical colleague of mine who has a great deal of editorial experience. I had never heard of it before so I quickly visited their Web site at www.wame.org. WAME is free and open to all editors of peer-reviewed medical journals. As of May 2006, they have more than 1409 members representing 890 journals from 90 countries. I completed the paperwork, sent it in and now JDH is part of a prestigious list of medical and a few dental journals. WAME is an organization that was established in 1995 to do several things. First, the organization seeks to facilitate worldwide cooperation and communication among editors of peer-reviewed medical journals. Another goal is to improve editorial standards, to promote "professionalism in medical editing through education, self criticism and self regulation."

Another reason why I am honored to be a part of this organization is because the only editors who can be members are ones who are in charge of determining the scientific content of a "peer-reviewed biomedical journal." WAME defines a peer-reviewed biomedical journal as "one that has submitted most of its published articles for review by experts who are not part of the editorial staff."

I must take this opportunity at the beginning of my tenure as Editor-in-Chief of our scientific peer-reviewed journal to publicly thank the members of the JDH Editorial Review Board who have given their time and expertise and who are extremely dedicated to keeping high standards in the peer review process. These individuals are busy dental hygienists just like you and me! Most of them hold academic appointments and have advanced degrees of a master's degree or a doctorate. Most are heavily involved in their own research agendas. They are writers and teachers, in private practice or

public health. Some are nurses, dentists, physicians, physical therapists and they know the science. They did not get there overnight. They did not graduate from dental hygiene school with expertise in writing or conducting research, or even with the understanding needed to thoroughly read a scientific research paper. They have worked hard over the years to gain the expertise, to seek out mentors, and to realize that one has to make oneself vulnerable in order to become better at this process of writing for peer-reviewed publications. This hard work has assisted them as they have published their own papers and also as they critique the hard work of their peers.

I am in the process of forming a new Editorial Review Board, which will consist of previous members of the board as well as new members. These individuals hold high ethical standards to ensure that scientific quality is upheld. They possess knowledge and expertise in a multitude of areas to ensure that the manuscripts accepted for publication in JDH are of high scientific quality and are valuable to our profession and the building of our unique knowledge base. Lastly, they spend many hours to help make the manuscripts accurate, readable, and relevant to all dental hygienists. The reviews are not based on opinion but rather on science. Each article is reviewed by three members who are "blinded" to the information about the authors or the authors' affiliation. What is the value of peer review? True peer review lends credibility and respect to our Journal. You can be assured that papers published in your Journal have been read and approved by an exhaustive process to bring you the best that science has to offer in dental hygiene.

Sincerely,

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