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Engaging Early-Career Geriatric Mental Health Investigators as Associate Editorial Board Members

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In his inaugural editorial as Editor-in-Chief of the *American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry*, Dr. Charles F. Reynolds III indicated that he was “very interested in recruiting early-career colleagues as associate members of the [AJGP editorial] Board...”¹ Early-career colleagues were encouraged to communicate their interest in serving as an associate member to Dr. Reynolds. We did, and Dr. Reynolds invited us to help develop this new position. This editorial outlines the development of *AJGP*’s associate member position, as well as our observations regarding the challenges and potential for this position. We hope that providing this information will stimulate discussion and actions to further support training in academic service and greater integration of early career-scientists in the peer-review process.

Developing the associate member position

To guide us in developing this position, we reviewed the literature, but found relatively little. In 2006, the *Ear, Nose & Throat Journal*’s Editorial Board created an opportunity to include surgical residents in the editorial process.² They solicited applications for two year terms, planning for residents to review manuscripts, receive copies of comments provided by other reviewers, and attend editorial board meetings at the society’s annual meetings. In a 2014 editorial,³ resident involvement in the *ENT Journal*’s Editorial Board was deemed a success: residents positively affected the quality of reviews, the program increased from two to eight residents, and many resident members were retained as permanent members of the Board.

In our initiative to develop an associate editorial board member position at *AJGP*, we worked closely with Dr. Reynolds and our mentors, Drs. Howard Aizenstein and Yeates Conwell. We had two overarching-goals. First, we aspired to create a position that would provide a meaningful experience in academic service, fostering a greater appreciation of the editorial process (beyond authoring or reviewing manuscripts). Second, we wanted the new position to be a “win-win” for associate members and the Board, providing *AJGP* with a

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new way of engaging early stage investigators in academic service. With these goals in mind, we drafted an outline of the associate member's job description.

In March 2016, we presented our proposal to the Editorial Board at the American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry's Annual Meeting. We proposed that associate board members would work with their mentors to complete a timeline of activities including: reviewing submitted manuscripts, examining other reviewers' comments, discussing decision-making with triage editors, contributing in each stage of the editorial process (e.g., selecting articles for peer-review, selecting reviewers, making/communicating decisions), observing *AJGP* issue assembly, participating in quarterly board meetings, and capitalizing on other opportunities that arise (e.g., disseminating *AJGP* news via Twitter). This plan was met with a high level of enthusiasm, with many *AJGP* Editorial Board members eager to more thoroughly engage their early-career colleagues. The associate board member position was subsequently approved, and we became inaugural members.

Our experience and potential challenges for the position ahead

The position has provided us with a "behind the scenes" look at the editorial process – from submission to print. This was possible because of the considerable support of our mentors and Dr. Reynolds who facilitated our engagement in the process and enabled us to achieve the job description's objectives. As a result, we have developed our peer-reviewing skills, as well as a greater appreciation for the journal's processes and their role in advancing high quality science.

We also have become aware of some potential barriers, or at least challenges, to the growth and success of *AJGP*'s associate member position. First, the associate member position should continue to honor the inter-disciplinary nature of *AJGP*. The position can be readily tailored to individuals' needs and interests – *provided associate members have committed engagement from senior colleagues in their specialty areas*. We are early-stage scientists in different areas of geriatric mental health. Engagement of varied disciplines sharing a focus on geriatric mental health is a strength that reflects the Editorial Board of *AJGP*, and we have found it rewarding to work together as associate board members and learn about our respective work. That said, the scientific subject-matter, and even associated cast of characters (e.g., authors and reviewers) associated with our specialty areas differ. We learned about these critical scientific and human aspects of disseminating academic work through our mentors (who regularly serve as triage editors for the journal). Thus, it may be challenging for *AJGP* to engage early-stage professionals in other geriatric mental health specialty areas without the investment of their senior colleagues on the Editorial Board. The position should continue to facilitate in-depth academic experiences that align with the interests of individual scholars.

Second, while the apprenticeship model is critical to the success of the position, it has inherent limitations. We designed the position so that it would benefit the Editorial Board, where a major function is performing peer-review. However, we primarily worked with our mentors at our home institutions, and rarely were called on by other triage editors, which limited some of the networking opportunities this position could have otherwise facilitated.

Options to optimize the associate member's contribution to *AJGP* include expanding the number of associate members and developing additional ways to integrate associate mentors with triage editors who are in their specialty areas but work at different institutions (which would concurrently strengthen the opportunity to connect with senior investigators).

Conclusion

The creation of associate editorial board members provides early exposure to the editorial process at *AJGP* and invests in explicit academic service training for early-career scientists. Serving as associate members of *AJGP*'s Editorial Board provided us with formative experiences and insights into a career in academic research that we would not have been able to replicate elsewhere at our career stage. Furthermore, we are optimistic that this position will continue to evolve to maximize its service to the journal and field. We sincerely appreciate this valuable training opportunity provided by the Editorial Board, our mentors, and Dr. Reynolds.

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