



Journal of Neurotherapy: Investigations in Neuromodulation, Neurofeedback and Applied Neuroscience

Time for a Change

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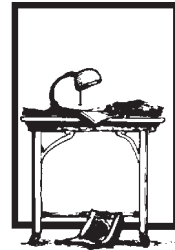
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EDITORIAL



Time for a Change

This will be the last volume of the *Journal of Neurotherapy* that appears under my editorship. Tim Tinius will be stepping up from Associate Editor to Editor beginning with Volume 9 and I will continue with the Journal as Editor Emeritus through Volume 9 to smooth that transition. This has been a long announced plan of succession for the leadership of the *Journal of Neurotherapy*, Tim Tinius being approved as Editor designate by the ISNR Board in 2002. From my perspective now is the time to make this transition to ensure the continued growth of the *Journal* in both quality and subscription base.

It has been my pleasure to guide the *Journal* through its last six years—and six volumes. With the many contributions from all that have served as special issue Editors, Associate Editors, Section Editors, and Consulting Editors, and most especially authors, Darlene Nelson and I have led the production of 24 issues of the *Journal*. During this time quality has improved substantially due in large part with our collaboration with The Haworth Press, Inc. Darlene Nelson will continue to do

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her yeoman work as Managing Editor, coordinating the entire publication and review process for each issue, and working closely with the entire staff of The Haworth Press, Inc. to ensure continuity. So much of what this journal has become is due to her daily effort.

Tim Tinius, an active neurotherapy clinician and academic, brings his experiences as ISNR Newsletter Editor, Associate Editor and special issue Editor of the *Journal of Neurotherapy* as he takes the helm. His job will be multifaceted—recruiting quality submissions in a field where competition is high, guiding new authors through the learning experience of creating publishable work, coordinating and setting standards for the peer-review process, smoothing ruffled feathers of the disappointed and the disgruntled, and seeking continued growth in listing and rating services (to name a few of his tasks). The continued appointment of high quality Associate Editors (including section editors) and Consulting Editors that share his vision will be paramount.

In this closing editorial, I would like to discuss a few things that I wish I would have paid more attention to in the growth of the journal, and express a few things that I think are important enough to say again. I am confident that the journal's peer review policies will continue: peer review must be conducted in such a way that any reviewer who may have a commercial or other bias toward an author should be excused from the process. The journal can not play the role of arbiter in interpersonal disputes. It is imperative that the members of ISNR, the parent organization of the *Journal of Neurotherapy*, continue to keep personal disputes and commercial interests far away from their scientific peer-reviewed publication.

The peer-review process has its shortcomings, with high agreement of rejected papers by reviewers, but usual disagreement on accepted papers (Howard & Wilkinson, 1998; Rothwell & Martyn, 2000). It has been the policy of the journal to assign three reviewers to submitted papers that are deemed suitable for review. The decision to publish an individual paper has often been controversial with one of the three reviewers dissenting. It has been my policy to let the majority rule regarding the decision to publish, yet the important points made by a dissenting reviewer are lost to the reader in this process. One interesting approach to this dilemma would be to publish accompanying comments by the dissenting reviewer along with the approved and accepted paper. This would require the willingness of the participants to present their arguments in a dispassionate and logical way.

Also, not everything published in the *Journal* is acceptable to all readers. One widely accepted way to represent readers' dissenting

points of view is through continued scholarly dialogue published in subsequent issues, with responses by the authors whose work is in question. Continued published review of published works by critical readers serves the end of advancing clinical science. In order to do this the writers must be willing to simply discuss the facts, avoiding personal attacks. I hope that in the future the *Journal* can create some mechanism for discussing points of dispute (pre- or post-publication) of the many fine papers that make it to print.

The editor needs to be regarded as the chief referee in the peer-review process of a journal, free from coercion and intimidation. This process includes appointment of editorial staff and assignment of reviewers and the collaborative creation of guidelines for the process. The objective is to have a level playing field where biases such as personal vendetta and conflict of interest play no part. To take the playing field analogy a step further, honoring the referee's decision in sporting events is the backbone of athletic ethic to the extent that personal attacks on referees are not tolerated under any circumstance. There need to be mechanisms in place for resolving or arbitrating disputes about *Journal* policy and decisions, and personal attacks or intimidation by ISNR members on the Editor need never be tolerated. Tim Tinius and his team and his successors deserve a pledge of respect and support from ISNR members. These are volunteers who have stepped forward to take on the time consuming and sometimes quite stressful job of creating a quality journal for ISNR. At the same time it is important to recognize that editors are often ill prepared for their job, appointed by boards or committees and lacking any formal education to fill (or even create) their job description. The development of editorial policy and guidelines is highly arbitrary and requirements for the training of journal editors as researchers or in the critical appraisal of medical information are not formalized (Ray, 2000). As much collaboration as possible should go in to the ongoing creation of editorial policy and procedure.

In my opinion, neurotherapy is seen as alternative medicine by the mainstream (but as evidence-based medicine by its practitioners). So much of what neurotherapists (as well as clinicians in main stream medicine) do is based on belief in the power of personal experience, so much more art than science. In my view, the lack of precise clinical science encourages dogmatic and territorial disputes, based on differences of opinion regarding appropriate therapies and perceived shortage mentality. But the body of evidence of neurotherapy continues to grow, and it is the task of the journal to nurture that growth. Acceptance and standardization of neurotherapy will be based on evidence. Dogmatic dis-

putes still bog us down, substantially less so than they once did, as our annual scientific meetings and our journal continue to evolve towards evidence-based rationality. The journal and the field of neurotherapy and ISNR have a long road of evolution and growth ahead. Looking back down that part of the road covered by the journal over the past six years, it seems apparent to me that the direction is established, and the destinations are reachable.

The growth of the journal depends on a number of things, including continued incentives for high quality submissions. Further definition of the roles of Editor, Associate Editors and Consulting Editors will undoubtedly occur. Mechanisms for reasonable dispute settling within the editorial process both pre-publication (the peer-review process) and post-publication (reader evaluation) need to be further developed to sharpen the critical edge of the journal, and to involve the readership in dissenting points of view. Finally, the readership needs encouragement to participate in ongoing evaluation and feedback, via letters to the Editor, and surveys.

I wish Tim Tinius and all the staff of the *Journal of Neurotherapy* well, and I hope the journal experiences continued growth and prosperity. Being editor over the last six years has been an important part of my life, and I leave the post with a feeling of satisfaction that many of my goals for the journal were accomplished.

David L. Trudeau, MD
Editor

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