NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHER

Innovations and Updates to the American Journal of Occupational Therapy

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As 2014 draws to a close, it is an opportune time to reflect on the tremendous strides AJOT has made under the tenure of Sharon Gutman, whose 6 yr of service as Editor-in-Chief ended this past July, and to look forward to the exciting directions in which the journal is headed under its new Editor-in-Chief, Lorie Gage Richards.

Accomplishments

Over the past 6 yr, AJOT’s 5-yr impact factor—the measure of a journal’s impact on research computed by Journal Citation Reports (JCR)—has grown from 0.971 in 2007 to 1.831 in 2013. The journal’s 2-yr impact factor has more than doubled, from 0.673 in 2007 to 1.552 in 2013. This growth reflects the increased quantity and quality of research as well as an insistence on a high level of rigor in any article to be accepted for publication (see Gutman, 2014, in this issue). AJOT is currently the top occupational therapy journal in JCR and ranks in the top 20 of the 66 rehabilitation journals listed in JCR.

One element in the growth of AJOT’s impact factor is the journal’s 2010 transition to an online platform. This move included the implementation of the BenchPress online manuscript submission process. In tandem, the changes expanded the journal’s audience of researchers, including potential authors. The result has been growth in readership worldwide as well as a higher number and quality of Level I and II research papers submitted. Our reciprocal access agreements with the British Journal of Occupational Therapy and the Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy, which would not be possible without an online platform, also have expanded our online readership.

Other changes that are possible only with the advent of an online platform include use of the CrossCheck system to verify that submitted papers are free of plagiarism and the new FundRef system, which will help track the source of research funding and cite it consistently from article to article. In addition, instructors who want to use AJOT articles in their course packets and authors who want to reprint portions of articles can easily obtain permission by clicking on the Tools tab and selecting “Get Permissions.” And, of course, readers can set Alerts to keep them informed about research on specific topics. In short, online publishing has enabled many handy tools and features to streamline the work of our readers. One wonders how we ever managed before 2010!

Challenges

The current publishing environment presents many challenges to academic journals like AJOT. The growth of the Internet disrupted existing publishing business models and hit academic publishers particularly hard. Ad revenue in all sectors has dramatically decreased as advertisers have moved their advertising online (where it is far cheaper),
and the expenses of paper, printing, and postage continue to increase. Academic and other libraries face ongoing budget constraints, limiting their acquisitions. In response, many journals are charging more for print or are even online only, having done away with paper for all but a handful of readers. Fortunately for academic publishers, most readers typically turn first to the online version of their journals.

Because virtually all research now begins with the use of online search engines, AJOT has implemented changes that are not necessarily obvious to readers, such as semantic tagging of articles and an improved search engine for the site. We began assigning digital object identifiers (DOIs) to our articles when the journal moved online in 2010, and all articles back to 1980 are now forever retrievable if a reader has the DOI at hand. We are exploring the possibility of adding content that predates 1980 to the AJOT site.

Of course, the use of the Internet means that AJOT—like all journals—faces competition from multiple information sources. To stand out from the crowd, it is ever more vital that AJOT remain the premier occupational therapy journal. Maintaining and increasing the journal’s impact factor is part of that effort and is a core function of the Editor-in-Chief. In addition, initiatives such as moving to continuous publishing, slated for implementation in January 2015, will help attract high-quality research by reducing the time from submission to publication. The goal is for articles to be published approximately 3 months after acceptance.

In addition, AJOT has joined an important initiative among leading rehabilitation journals in adopting the EQUATOR Network Reporting Guidelines (Chan, Heinemann, & Roberts, 2014). These guidelines serve to increase the transparency of clinical research reporting and will further boost the quality of research published in the journal. In addition, researchers publishing intervention effectiveness studies in AJOT are asked to adhere to specific reporting standards that are based on those commonly used in the clinical research community (see Gutman, 2010).

Future Endeavors

Building on our electronic platform, exciting projects are in the works for AJOT. First up is the move to continuous publishing, mentioned earlier. In addition, the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) has launched an online initiative to better integrate AJOT with other AOTA Press publications, such as practice guidelines, textbooks, and reference works.

Under the leadership of Lorie Richards, AJOT will continue to expand its reach by publishing articles intended for multidisciplinary audiences while soliciting and publishing the highest quality research. Another tool that will expand the journal’s reach is “pay-per-view,” scheduled for implementation in late 2015, which will allow nonsubscribers to purchase individual articles for download. Finally, innovations such as advance open access (whereby articles become available without a subscription on a fee basis) and online-only publishing are under consideration.

Conclusion

As the occupational therapy profession nears its centennial, AJOT continues to play a key role in making the profession “powerful, widely recognized, science-driven, and evidence-based,” as stated in AOTA’s (2007) Centennial Vision. Although the accomplishments and ongoing projects described here are in support of that vision, they do not end with 2017. Appropriate use of technology and staying alert to important developments in the field are fundamental to our work. The goal is for AJOT to be ever more vital to researchers and clinicians in supporting their work and to lead the way as a forum for the latest and highest quality occupational therapy research.

References