Adapting to the Changing Landscape of Open Access Medical Publishing at *JAMA Network Open*

Eli N. Perencevich, MD, MS

During the Zika virus epidemic in 2015 to 2016, journal signatories, including *JAMA Network*, made all content related to the virus free to access. The COVID-19 pandemic further revealed the importance of open-access publication to public health and health equity. In May 2018, between these 2 epidemics, founding Editor in Chief Frederick P. Rivara, MD, MPH (University of Washington), and Deputy Editor Stephan D. Fihn, MD MPH (University of Washington), cited several trends as motivations for starting a new open-access general medical journal. These included the expansion of global investment in scientific research, the migration from print to digital delivery of journal content, and calls to ensure the benefits of funded scholarship were made readily available worldwide.

By any measure, *JAMA Network Open* has been an extraordinary success. Since 2019, we have seen submissions increase from 3100 to nearly 15,000 in 2023. Our publication rate has grown from a few articles published every Friday to a mean of 40 articles spread across the workweek. Importantly, the quality and reach of the articles has increased in tandem. In 2023, *JAMA Network Open* published 1960 research articles, and 202 of these were reports of clinical trials. Articles published in *JAMA Network Open* last year had more than 30 million views and 73,000 media mentions. *JAMA Network Open*’s impact factor is one of the highest among general medical open-access journals. There are many reasons that *JAMA Network Open* has emerged as the world’s leading large-volume open-access journal, including its synergy with the other 12 journals that comprise *JAMA Network*. What cannot be overstated in the journal’s growth and success has been the commitment and vision of its first editor in chief.

With Immense Gratitude to Frederick P. Rivara

It is nearly impossible to express the appreciation that the medical community, the entire *JAMA Network*, and *JAMA Network Open* have for Dr Rivara for his leadership during the past 24 years. Dr Rivara became editor in chief of *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine*, now *JAMA Pediatrics*, in 2001. While shepherding the journal through its name change and integration into *JAMA Network*, *JAMA Pediatrics* became the preeminent journal focused on child and adolescent health. In 2018, he became the editor in chief of *JAMA Network Open*. It was Dr Rivara’s vision and commitment to excellence, including rigorous external peer review, multilevel editorial oversight, external statistical review of all published manuscripts overseen by internal statistical editors, and the same world-class editing and production processes offered at all *JAMA Network* journals, that has guided *JAMA Network Open*.

As with all journals, particularly large-volume open-access journals, there is a potential tension between the need to publish a certain number of articles and the scientific rigor of the research reported in those articles. As one of the initial cadre of associate editors, I can confirm Dr Rivara never wavered from his focus of publishing the best science. An objective example of this is the 12% acceptance rate. I thank Dr Rivara for his mentorship and support over the past 6 years, particularly

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during our weekly COVID-19–specific manuscript calls. Somehow, we managed the deluge of COVID-19 manuscripts as they reached 39% of all submissions. Dr Rivara’s vision, dedication, and leadership have been extraordinary, and no one can adequately fill his shoes. Fortunately, with the continued support of JAMA Network, no one person has to.

The Editorial Team

I am honored to continue to work with an exceptional editorial team as the second editor in chief of JAMA Network Open, and I am grateful to Dr Fihn for his willingness to stay on as executive deputy editor. His wisdom and experience will greatly smooth the transition. We will be joined by new deputy editors Elizabeth A. Jacobs, MD, MAPP (MaineHealth), and Howard S. Kim, MD, MS (Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine).

The team includes 2 outstanding statistical editors, Jesse A. Berlin, ScD (School of Public Health, Rutgers University), and Sebastien J. P. A. Haneuse, PhD (Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health), and an accomplished group of associate editors: Steven M. Bradley, MD, MPH (Minneapolis Heart Institute); Angel N. Desai, MD, MPH (University of California, Davis); Utibe R. Essien, MD, MPH (University of California, Los Angeles); Faith M. Gunning, PhD (Weill Cornell Medical College, Cornell University); Arden M. Morris, MD, MPH (Stanford University School of Medicine); Roisin E. O’Cearbhaill, MD (Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center); Olugbenga Ogedegbe, MD, MS, MPH (New York University School of Medicine); Francisco J. Pasquell, MD, MPH (Department of Medicine, Emory University); Elizabeth Powell, MD, MPH (Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine); Alejandro A. Rabinstein, MD (Mayo Clinic College of Medicine); Gordon D. Rubenfeld, MD, MSc (Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre, University of Toronto); Kaveh G. Shojania, MD (Department of Medicine, University of Toronto); Lawrence N. Shulman, MD (University of Pennsylvania); Stephanie A. Studenski, MD (University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine); Beth A. Tarini, MD, MS, MBA (Children’s National Hospital); Nathan Seth Trueger, MD, MPH (Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine) (additionally serving as digital media editor); Monica Vela, MD (University of Illinois College of Medicine) (additionally serving as diversity, equity, and inclusion associate editor); and Rachel M Werner, MD, PhD (Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania). In addition, Heba Mesbah, MD, PhD (Baylor College of Medicine), and Mary Regina Royan, MD, MPH (University of Michigan), serve as assistant editors. I would also like to thank the Editorial Board for their continued commitment to JAMA Network Open as well as the journal’s statistical reviewers and distinguished peer reviewers (all of whom are listed in the journal’s masthead).^4

One cannot publish a high-quality journal without an accomplished and professional publication management team. I would like to thank the executive managing editor Annette Flanagan, RN, MA; senior editorial manager Daniel Lowden; managing editor Heather Green; and the JAMA Network editorial and publishing teams for their support and patience during this transition. I would like to also thank Kirstin Bibbins-Domingo, PhD, MD, MAS; Gregory Curfman, MD; and the entire JAMA Network for entrusting me with this responsibility.

The Next Steps

The mission of JAMA Network Open will remain unchanged: “to improve health, health care, and health equity worldwide through open access dissemination of high quality, innovative, general medical research and commentary by and for a broad range of clinicians, researchers, policy makers, and public health and health care leaders.”^5 In pursuit of this, JAMA Network Open will continue evolving to meet the challenges facing large-volume but selective, high-quality, open-access publications.

One of the first challenges we will face is that by the end of 2025, all US tax-payer–funded papers may be required to be published immediately with free public access, which is a change from...
the current 1-year embargo policy. Funder and governmental policies regarding open access are shifting worldwide. How journals respond to these policies could alter where authors send their manuscripts. In addition, deceptive practices and misinformation threaten the integrity of scholarly publishing and science on large scales. To meet these challenges and the competitive medical publishing landscape, which includes preprint and other repositories, I remain committed to upholding editorial standards and providing the highest-quality peer review possible.

Equitably reviewing more than 15,000 annual submissions is an immediate challenge. To address this issue, our 2 newly promoted deputy editors will assist with initial editorial review and triage of manuscripts. Likewise, we are hiring additional associate editors to expand the depth and breadth of our editorial team—our aim in doing so is to allocate additional time to individual manuscripts. In addition, we will collaborate with JAMA Network to identify ways we can use technology to assist with editorial and peer review. The focus of this collaboration will be to reduce potential bias in editorial decisions and the time burden inherent in any review process. Another way to increase the quality and fairness of our review process is by growing the networks we rely on for external peer review. There are highly qualified groups that have traditionally been left on the sidelines during peer review processes, and we welcome their participation.

Another challenge we must meet is delivering content that is relevant to our global readership. Presently, 68% of submissions to JAMA Network Open are from authors outside of the US. We will remain committed to increasing the geographic reach of our authors, reviewers, and readers by expanding the geographic diversity of our editorial team and collaborating across JAMA Network to grow authorship and peer reviewer engagement efforts. We will also ensure our content is readily accessible and useful to clinicians outside large academic medical centers. With guidance and support from JAMA Network, we will be looking at ways to directly reach busy clinicians in places such as critical access hospitals and in rural locations throughout the world.

Other challenges to be confronted include the continued consolidation of the publication industry, which will create additional pressures on smaller publishers, many of which are not-for-profit, such as JAMA Network. Journals will need to continually adapt to the evolution of artificial intelligence, including use of large language models, which will require substantial expertise and resources. Another looming issue will be responding to calls to ensure the scientific integrity, accuracy, and transparency of the studies we publish as research methods become increasingly complex.

Perhaps most importantly, we will remain deeply committed to expanding the diversity of the editors and researchers reviewing manuscripts both for JAMA Network Open and across the medical community. In July 2023, JAMA Network Open launched the Health Equity Editorial Fellowship, under the leadership of Dr Vela, to engage and mentor early career faculty in the editorial process. The first 6 faculty recently graduated from the program, and we look forward to welcoming the 2024 to 2025 fellows on our weekly manuscript calls and watching their successes as they become the next generation of associate editors and editors in chief.

There is so much that I look forward to in becoming editor in chief, including the honor of reviewing the latest medical science and working with JAMA Network Open editors and staff to deliver high-quality and clinically significant science every weekday to everyone across the globe. I am excited to connect with the authors and readers as we evolve and grow this journal together, and I welcome your feedback.
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Corresponding Author: Eli N. Perencevich, MD, MS, Department of Internal Medicine, The University of Iowa, Carver College of Medicine, CADRE (152), Iowa City VA Medical Center, 601 Hwy 6W, Iowa City, IA 52246 (eli.perencevich@jamanetwork.org).

Author Affiliations: Editor in Chief, JAMA Network Open; Department of Internal Medicine, University of Iowa Carver College of Medicine, Iowa City VA Medical Center, Iowa City.

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REFERENCES