

WRITING A BOOK REVIEW FOR PUBLICATION IN THE *JOURNAL OF CLINICAL NURSING*

I have been the Book Review Editor for the *Journal of Clinical Nursing* for almost two years now and, by and large, have found this role enjoyable and worthwhile. It has introduced me to new books and brought me into contact with new people, both of which have been stimulating experiences. It has also been gratifying to see a constant supply of, largely unsolicited, books arrive from various publishers, and to find that the vast majority of people who are asked to review a book are delighted to do so and complete the task within the agreed time frame. In addition, I have come to think of book reviews, and thus the role of book review editor, as valuable because they provide the opportunity for both reviewers and readers to keep pace with developments in nursing theory and practice.

It may be helpful for readers and potential reviewers if I describe the process of commissioning, writing, editing and publishing a book review. Over the past year a database of potential reviewers has been built up, managed and continuously updated by the journal's editorial assistant. It includes details of potential reviewers' clinical and academic interests, which enable me to select an appropriate reviewer for each book. I usually make first contact by email, giving brief details of the book, author(s), number of pages and time frame. If the person approached agrees to review the book, I send it to them along with the following guidelines:

- The review should be 500-750 words in length and completed in 4-6 weeks.
- You can keep any book that you review. However, if you do not provide a review you may be asked to return the book.
- Please try to deal with the book's strengths and weaknesses in a balanced way.
- Blackwell Publishing (the publisher of the *Journal of Clinical Nursing*) gives the following advice: 'The reviewer should take care not to write anything libellous. The review should criticise the book not the author. Any criticism of the book should be backed up with an example.' Please give a page number for the example, if possible.
- At the end of the review please give your name, job title and the full name of your employer. If you are a lecturer/practitioner or hold some other form of joint appointment please give both your job titles and name both employers.
- Please email the completed review to drkmwilson@c-c-h.fsnet.co.uk

If the reviewer is unable to email the review, I ask for a disk copy and hard copy to be sent to me at the address given on the front inside cover of the journal. Following receipt of the review, I edit it and send the edited version to the reviewer for approval. Once this has been obtained, the review goes through the usual copy editing, printing and publishing processes. At the end of this process, a copy of the review is sent to the book's publisher.

I would like to add that, on request, I will give further guidance on writing a review to potential reviewers. This usually includes advice about looking at book reviews in back copies of the journal but, in general, I prefer not to make detailed suggestions about content and style. In addition, I am prepared to discuss and 'bend' the time frame, especially for encyclopaedic tomes of 1000 pages or more.

Whilst I am very happy with the way that things have gone over the past two years, there is an important issue that I would like to address: the great majority of reviewers on our database work in higher education settings. We are, of course, extremely grateful to them for their willingness and for the high standard of the work they produce, and we will continue to draw on their skills. However, we are keen to maintain the clinical focus and credibility of the journal and, therefore, would like more practitioners to put themselves forward as reviewers. This might also help to increase the number of potential reviewers who are prepared to review books on basic nursing care and skills; at present, we have a shortfall in this area.

Some practitioners may lack confidence about writing for publication. Writing a book review for the *Journal of Clinical Nursing* is a good opportunity to get into print for the first time, as it involves writing a short piece on a topic of interest to the practitioner, with the support of an editor who will facilitate the process of getting it published. For practitioners, it may be a useful exercise in practising critical skills, which may lead to further publications in the future. In addition, it can provide the satisfaction of knowing that they have increased the knowledge of readers working in non-clinical settings by offering the valuable perspectives of those who work in close contact with patients and other service users.

Clinical practitioners (and others) who would like to review books for the *Journal of Clinical Nursing* should contact the journal's editorial assistant at jcn@oxon.blackwellpublishing.com

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Book Review Editor