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# Does the editorial committee still have a role to play?

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Established 80 years ago, the editorial committee of the Journal of the Norwegian Medical Association has been reorganised for a new era.

The editorial committee was established in 1938 (1). In the preceding years, the Journal of the Norwegian Medical Association had been edited by the editor-in-chief as well as the general secretary. Their division of responsibility was unclear – it was said that ‘an article could be rejected by one of them, but accepted by the other’ (1). In 1938, editor Carl Schiøtz died, and general secretary Jørgen H. Berner established the first editorial committee with external members: Carl Semb (1895–1971), Axel Strøm (1901–1985) and Hans Jacob Ustvedt (1903–1982) (1).

In 2009, the editorial committee undertook a review of its role and remit. This resulted in the job description *Editorial Committee of the Journal of the Norwegian Medical Association*, which was published online and in an editorial (2). The committee’s objective was to assist the journal’s editor-in-chief with advice on strategic and operational choices and act as a liaison between the readers/contributors and the group of editors. The editorial committee was not to be involved in ordinary editorial work (3, 4), but envisaged a role for itself as a partner and advisor to the editor-in-chief in the event of any conflicts with the Norwegian Medical Association (2).

The change of editor-in-chief in 2015 highlighted the need to clarify the relationship between the journal and its owner, the Norwegian Medical Association (3), not least because the editors of the five largest international medical journals made enquires to us about this process. The editorial committee therefore championed a comprehensive review of the organisation. The governing bodies of the Norwegian Medical Association appointed a commission to look into the matter. Its mandate was to ‘assess all relationships between the Journal of the Norwegian Medical Association and the Norwegian Medical Association in its role as owner, including how the editor of the journal can safeguard his/her authority and responsibility according to the Rights and Duties of the Editor and the Vancouver Declaration, the role and responsibility of the editorial committee, the roles and responsibilities of the Central Board and the National Representative Meeting, communication channels and reporting routines, how disputes with the owner should be handled, and any amendments to the bylaws that may follow from the review’. In addition, the recommendations from the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) were used as a basis (5). The commission members were selected with great care. Especially interesting was the input provided by the external participants: The Norwegian Press Association, The Norwegian Specialised Press Association and the editor-in-chief of the Journal of the Danish Medical Association. These were taken aback both by the role of the editorial committee and the fact that the owner was represented on it.

The commission’s recommendations, which were unanimously adopted by the National Representative Meeting of the Norwegian Medical Association in 2016, included the incorporation of the goals of the editorial committee as formulated in 2009 into the association’s bylaws. The editorial committee was reorganised into a body appointed by the editor-in-chief, with no owner representation. The commission also recommended the appointment of a new council, the Journal Council, which was to be involved in hiring, evaluating and terminating the contract of the editor-in-chief as appropriate. The chair of the editorial committee is a permanent member of the Journal Council.

As a result, the editorial committee’s role now accords with the recommendations from ICMJE (5) and the Rights and Duties of the Editor (4). The course that was set in 2009 is maintained (2) – discussions of the journal’s strategy and policy, finances and processing of manuscripts. This includes not only analyses of the current status and comparisons with preceding years, but also input to editorial processes. As before, our duties include participating in the editorial committee’s meetings, assessing and occasionally writing editorials and arranging regional meetings with the journal’s medical collaborators. At each meeting, ‘Input from the medical communities’ is a regular item on the agenda. In

addition, the committee arranges annual regional meetings with the journal's medical collaborators. New agenda items for our meetings include information and discussions of the journal's international position and assessment of a single issue of the journal, including the web page. We have held a strategy seminar and undertaken an analysis of the journal's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. On this basis we provide advice to the editors regarding issues that might be included in the journal's strategies and plans.

Overall, we are impressed by the performance of the journal's editors. We are glad to be able to contribute to the development of the most regularly occurring and most manifest membership benefit of the Norwegian Medical Association, and we believe that an overwhelming majority of the readership shares this opinion. We invite all readers to contact us with advice and comments on issues that will have importance for our journal, now and in the years to come.

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