Letters to the Editor

We Want to Know What You’re Thinking

Letters to the Editor are greatly valued because they serve as unobtrusive measures of what our readers think of us and the material we publish in the Journal of Psychosocial Nursing and Mental Health Services. Letters provide as much information, if not more, as we would glean from well-run focus groups. While we have never conducted a full-scale study of the letters, we believe they represent the broad interests of our readers and that the writers include both genders and all ages, geographical areas, specialties, and ethnic backgrounds.

Of course, it is very pleasant when we receive letters that applaud our efforts and provide positive feedback about a recent article or feature, but we also value the letters that are critical about the journal or an article. We also welcome letters that identify a clinical concern, which the author believes is not being addressed in the workplace or in the press. We accept letters about perceived administrative shortfalls, personal reflections, and pleas for particular action.

With this issue, we have revamped our Guidelines for Authors. In these new guidelines, found on Cover 3 of this issue, you will find a section on Letters to the Editor. In this Editorial, I offer some expanded instructions:

- Always sign your letter and provide a postal and e-mail address. Your letter may be published anonymously, if you wish, but we need to know who you are. Some reasons for requesting anonymity include letter topics related to whistleblowing or prior unethical action, about which the author wants to write.
- Always make a point of stating, preferably in the first sentence, what your letter addresses. Is it a comment about a recent article? A personal, strongly held opinion? A complaint about a journal policy? A request for more information?
- Avoid ad hominem attacks on authors of articles or special sections. This includes statements made by the Editor. “Address the problem, not the person” is always good advice.
- Take time to make your points explicitly and clearly. Your message needs to be delivered in a straightforward way.
- Pay attention to the information in the new Guidelines for Authors. Specifically, keep the letters focused on material of interest to our readers and keep them short (500 words or less). References should only be used for controversial statements that need documentation, and no more than three should be included.
- If the letter contains an opinion, you need to tell us whether or not you have sent the letter, as is, to other media.
- After you write the letter, put it away for a day or two before you send it. Read it again and decide whether
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it needs some editing or modifying. Try reading it to a colleague, then send it to us.

Writing a Letter to the Editor is an excellent way for a beginner to start his or her writing career. Seeing one’s name in print is always an ego-enhancing event.

Be aware that we share letters that are critical about articles with the article author(s) and invite them to write a response. We try to print both in the same issue. If you think the response from the author requires a rejoinder from you, we would also consider printing it.

As with any material that appears in the Journal, we reserve the right to edit any letter or response we receive for clarity or length, always attempting to avoid changing the intended meaning. These edits are shared before publication.

It is also important to write your letters in a timely fashion. If the topic is a recent article or news event, don’t wait 2 months to write your letter. Very often, I construct editorials or other written work on my morning walk. I do this “in my head” and then I immediately jot down the main points when I return home. The polishing comes later. Some people find speaking into a tape recorder is a good way to get started.

You may also find it interesting to know that occasionally, when I have a conversation with a nurse about some professional topic, I often invite the nurse to write a Letter to the Editor. Often, the nurse had not considered such an avenue but accepts the challenge. We also accept letters from members of other disciplines, such as psychiatrists, social workers, psychologists, rehabilitation specialists, and laypeople in the community who want to be “heard” in print.

This month’s Tip of the Month is: find the words. Please do so and write to us. We answer every letter.

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Editor