

European Society of Cardiology National Cardiovascular Journals: the ‘Editors’ Network’

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Stimulating high-quality cardiovascular research is a major goal of the European Society of Cardiology (ESC).^{1–3} The ESC publishes two official general journals: the *European Heart Journal* and *Cardiovascular Research*,^{1–3} and several official sub-speciality journals. In addition, most European countries also have their own cardiovascular journals. National Society Cardiovascular Journals (NSCJ) have classically played a major role in disseminating high-quality scientific research, in education, and in the harmonization of clinical practice. Most NSCJ are published in local languages but many of them incorporate English editions and have obtained major international recognition. Altogether, NSCJ complement ESC official journals and provide a highly effective means to further disseminate European cardiovascular research.

Background

Promoting collaboration among NSCJ appeared highly desirable to facilitate advancement in knowledge and foster diffusion of scientific and educative contents. Therefore, under the auspices of the ESC, the first meeting of the NSCJ Editors took place in 2005 in Stockholm and received ESC Board approval. Since then a formal meeting of the NSCJ Editors has always been held at the annual ESC Congress. On April 2007, during the Spring Summit at the European Heart House in Nice, the ‘Editors’ Club’ initiative was launched as an official ESC Task Force.^{3,4} The organization of the Task Force consists of a Nucleus of NSCJ Editors and remains within the membership division of the ESC, coordinated by the ESC vice president for National Societies. Further involvement of the ESC publishing department might be considered as required.

In April 2009, the name ‘Editors’ Network’ was considered more appropriate and this change was also approved by the ESC Board.

Joint editorial policies: ‘Mission Statement’ document

Developing a ‘Constitution Document’ and ‘Mission Statement’ was soon considered a key step to set the basis of future collaboration among the NSCJ Editors.⁴ The objective was to issue a core document with fundamental principles upon which all the NSCJ Editors would agree in order to formalize the ESC NSCJ Task Force. This document eventually had major diffusion and editorial impact. A joint simultaneous publication was organized in 2008. The document was initially endorsed and published by 39 official NSCJ and translated into 14 different languages.⁴ As a second wave, all ‘affiliated’ ESC national societies were also invited to participate in this editorial initiative. This Mission Statement has been recently endorsed and will be published in 2009 by 13 journals of affiliated societies and two additional journals (of these four versions were translated into Spanish and one into Portuguese). Therefore, this effort should be considered one of the most important and successful joint editorial initiatives ever organized under the umbrella of the ESC.

The main proposals of the ‘Mission Statement’ document are presented in *Table 1*. Besides, general editorial considerations were extensively reviewed and discussed. It was emphasized that both technical and ethical issues should be addressed to gain editorial excellence.^{4–8} Promoting editorial quality standards was considered of paramount importance to increase the

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Table 1 Mission statement

1. *To increase collaboration among the NSCJ Editors.* Standing and *ad hoc* committees will be created. Common editorial policies should be developed. As needed, editorials, uniform requirements, and consensus documents will be issued.
2. *To promote editorial excellence.* Scientific content, quality requirements, credibility, and editorial and research ethics will be promoted.
3. *To improve diffusion of scientific knowledge.* Recognition and diffusion of European cardiovascular research, ESC clinical practice guidelines, and other scientific or education initiatives should be promoted.
4. *To share technical editorial information.* To share experiences, initiatives, publishing resources, and technical tools among the NSCJ Editors.
5. *To provide an operative framework and dataset* that will enable future joint ventures and comprehensive European publishing initiatives. To further stimulate collaboration between the NSCJ Editors and the ESC scientific bodies and publishing department.
6. *Public relations.* To provide a common voice when issues concerning NSCJ arise.
7. *To foster collaboration between National Societies and the ESC.* To bridge the gap between ESC official journals and NSCJ. To support European incentives to stimulate publication of quality research.

attractiveness of our publications in the globalized and highly competing field of academic cardiovascular medicine. The Task Force strongly suggested the adherence to the uniform recommendations of International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE). These recommendations have recently shifted the emphasis from the original technical requirements (focused on unifying formal aspects of manuscript preparation), to principles of editorial ethics and policies that should govern biomedical publishing.^{5,8} In particular, it was considered that the CONSORT recommendations should be followed to improve presentation of randomized clinical trials.⁹ Likewise, editorial standards should be maintained in electronic editions. Currently, online editions represent the most efficient means for disseminating scientific information^{3,10} The importance of facilitating electronic connectivity was emphasized and, it was suggested that, whenever possible, online journals editions should be made freely available.

On the other hand, the document stated that ethical considerations directly affect the credibility of the scientific content. Transparency, trust, and honesty in the process involved in performance and publication of research should be ensured.^{4–8} The final purpose should be to protect the process of scientific exchange. Accordingly, explicitly disclosing the role of the sponsor in research studies became increasingly relevant. Other concepts such as Editorial Freedom and Editorial Independence, recently emphasized by the ICMJE, World Association of Medical Editors, and Council of Science Editors^{4–8} were addressed. The NSCJ Editors should jealously safeguard the editorial independence of their respective national journals. The peer review process was considered as an essential part of the editorial scientific process. Therefore, standards for peer review excellence should be developed.^{4–8} Other issues such as conflicts of interest and

requirements for authorship were also addressed. Publication bias should be prevented. The whole publication process is based on credibility, trust, authenticity, and scientific honesty.^{4–8} To further preserve scientific credibility, the NSCJ Editors should harmonize their policies regarding scientific misconduct and fraud.^{4,11–14} The HEART group issued a consensus document focused on redundant publication that might be used as a guideline.¹⁵ *Salami slicing* and *shotgunning* publication strategies were discouraged.^{11–14} Secondary publications should follow the ICMJE requirements.⁵ Finally, it was agreed that stimulating bibliometric indexes was of clear interest to gain international recognition^{16–18} However, padding the impact factor was discouraged. The NSCJ Editors should develop common policies to stimulate diffusion of European studies exclusively based on scientific quality and clinical relevance criteria. This would eventually overcome current citation biases, particularly against non-English and non-American biomedical journals.⁴

The NSCJ Editors committed to progressively adapt their local policies, including instructions to authors, to follow these general editorial recommendations.⁴ European NSCJ are heterogeneous and are published in different languages. Cooperation among NSCJ Editors is crucial to avoid 'Tower of Babel' phenomena precluding efficient dissemination of scientific information across Europe. Nevertheless, these recommendations allow enough space for editorial policies that shape the specific interest of every particular journal. Room for diversity should be guaranteed as the focus and scope of different NSCJ actually widely differ.⁴

Results of National Society Cardiovascular Journals Editors' Network initiatives

- (1) The portal on the ESC web page for the NSCJ was modified to increase its visibility. Currently, this site may be also reached directly from the scientific area of the ESC.³ Thus, the role of NSCJ in the enormous scientific input provided by the ESC is now adequately recognized.
- (2) Direct bidirectional links between the ESC and NSCJ and among NSCJ have been implemented to establish efficient networking tools connecting all European journals.³
- (3) Detailed editorial, logistic and organizational data from all corresponding journals were obtained. A comprehensive structured questionnaire (23 items) was devised. Full results of this survey are currently freely available from the ESC web page (metafile of national journals).³ This posted material will be updated annually. Currently, data on 46 NSCJ is available. Overall, 25 journals have been published for more than a decade. In addition to local languages, 12 journals are also available in English. The mean journals print run is 3135 copies. A system of 'peer review' is selected to evaluate manuscripts by 31 journals and 23 journals adhere to the requirements of the ICMJE. Twenty-nine journals are indexed (Index Medicus), 18 appear in PubMed (MEDLINE), and 5 have obtained an impact factor in 2008. Twenty-six NSCJ have an electronic edition, and 13 have already implemented

an electronic system for manuscript submission. A dedicated web page is currently offered by 25 NSCJ.^{3,4}

- (4) The NSCJ Editors should work to progressively adapt their policies to recommend the 'registration' of clinical trials prior to definitive publication. This should take into consideration currently available administrative national laws and European directives. Proposals for a uniform European 'Repository' of clinical trials, fulfilling established editorial requirements, should be encouraged.^{19–20}
- (5) Collaboration among NSCJ Editors is essential to further disseminate and promote clinical application of ESC clinical practice guidelines. After endorsement by National Societies, translation of these guidelines into national local languages facilitates their implementation into clinical practice.^{21–23} Publication of these guidelines in NSCJ should follow the general rules for 'secondary publication,' once primary publication in the *European Heart Journal* has been granted. Ensuring an early translation and publication process is important. This will help to elucidate success, viability, and implementation of different ESC initiatives at the national level.²⁴
- (6) Boosting dissemination of official ESC late breaking clinical trials, by readily translating and publishing their abstracts into local languages while paying great attention to preserve accuracy and scientific integrity, remains a challenge.⁴ However, this proposal eventually flourished during the 2009 ESC Congress in Barcelona as the result of a close coordination between ESC scientific bodies, ESC publishing department, and NSCJ Editors.
- (7) Increasing general awareness of the relevance of editorial issues. An official educative session on this topic 'Meet the Editors: Insights and Challenges' has been also organized at the 2009 ESC Congress.
- (8) Joint simultaneous publications of documents on editorial issues. The success of the 'Mission Statement' document has been previously detailed. A new consensus document from this Task Force: 'Role of Journals in Education' has been recently elaborated and circulated among all NSCJ Editors. This document emphasizes the role of journals in continuous medical education and will also summarize the results of a structured questionnaire (43 items) sent to all NSCJ. A joint publication in all NSCJ has been organized by the end of 2009.

Conclusions

The main goals of this pioneering effort are the following: (i) to increase collaboration among the NSCJ Editors, (ii) to enhance editorial standards and requirements for scientific quality, (iii) to preserve publication ethics, (iv) to guarantee scientific credibility, and (v) to expand dissemination of scientific knowledge. Commitment of the NSCJ Editors to achieve all these objectives (Table 1) is crucial and this ESC NSCJ 'Editors' Network' should provide a unique platform to foster these global editorial policies.

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