There have been three important changes in the Journal working force during 1983: Kenneth Rothman has joined us to provide your editor with needed expert assistance; George Annas has taken over from William Curran as Editor of the Public Health and the Law section; and Mary Arnold has succeeded Michel Ibrahim as the Chair of the Editorial Board. We continue to receive five or six times as many unsolicited manuscripts as we can publish—in 1983 we received 780, the largest number yet.

Another change, which readers may or may not have noticed, is that the Journal is now set in slightly smaller type and is far more parsimonious with its white space. This enables us to publish more pieces in each issue without increasing costs and to maintain the same acceptance rate in spite of an increased number of submissions. The change in format began in July; those interested can compare the June and July issues (for “Book Corner” compare May to June).

One Journal-related change which did not materialize in 1983 was a plan for a section called Notes from the Field to be published in our sister publication, The Nation’s Health.\(^1\) The Journal’s Editorial Board has reconsidered this decision; we now plan to inaugurate a Notes from the Field column as a regular section of the Journal in 1984.

We published, in 1983, 100 Articles, 47 Public Health Briefs, 12 Commentaries, eight Different Views, three Public Health and the Law and one Public Health Then and Now columns, 32 editorials, and 32 letters (not including author responses). Of the 780 unsolicited manuscripts we received in 1983, about 20 per cent were rejected by the Editor without being sent out for review. There are many reasons for such a decision. Journal policy precludes publication of editorials which do not take off from an article in the same issue of the Journal (although such submissions sometimes are suitable for our Commentary or Different Views section). Policy also precludes publication of manuscripts that describe a program or a curriculum but do not attempt to evaluate it. Such manuscripts may be newsworthy items for public health field personnel, however; and recognition of this fact led the Editorial Board to decide to include a Notes from the Field section in forthcoming issues of the Journal.

Other reasons for rejection without review include: inappropriateness for our readership, subject and findings not new or covered by other papers we have published, and a variety of oddities that must drift in unsolicited to the offices of many journals and magazines.

Although many aspects of Journal policy and procedure have been discussed before in this annual accountability report,\(^2\) others have not been laid out, and this is an opportunity to fill the gap. The breadth of disciplines and interest areas of our readership is equalled by few other professional journals. Our 15-member Editorial Board is appointed by the Association’s Executive Board for a three year term with one consecutive reappointment permitted. Its members have invariably served as reviewers. The Journal is the principal scientific publication of the American Public Health Association, and the Editorial Board is expected to reflect the scientific disciplines and interest areas represented in the modern field of public health. Since there are more disciplines and areas of interest within the Association than Editorial Board positions, some rotation of interest areas/disciplines occurs. The Editorial Board sets Journal policy, keeps tabs on the Editor, and reviews selected manuscripts. Our reviewers, who number well over 300 (see p 216) cover the broader span of disciplines and interest areas in the entire public health field.

Over half the papers we published deal with chronic disease, health care services, maternal and child health, population and occupational health; another quarter deal with communicable diseases, statistical methods, and health education.

Eighty per cent of the unsolicited manuscripts we receive are reviewed first by others: 17 per cent by one reviewer only (usually a member of the Editorial Board), 78 per cent by two reviewers, and 5 per cent by three or more reviewers (usually when opinions differ markedly or the Editor is not satisfied with the review). The peer review process, with author anonymity preserved when this is possible, has been discussed previously in these pages.\(^6\) All papers are read by the Editor or Assistant Editor. When two reviewers recommend rejection and spell out their reasons, the reading may be quite cursory and the letter to the author very brief; in other cases the reading and sometimes the letter to the author may be quite extensive with the editors, in effect, acting as additional reviewers. Prior to accepting a paper—virtually all papers are revised at least once—the text is read carefully and edited for clarity, conciseness and English usage. The final copy editing and layout are efficiently handled by Doyme Bailey and Michelle Horton, respectively, in Washington, DC.

In conclusion, I want to take this opportunity to correct two misperceptions of the Journal which have come to my attention. The first is a belief that a 1,000 word Public Health Brief or a Commentary is less important than a “full length article.” Neither the length nor the fact that it is not classified as an article establishes the importance of a published paper. Briefs, Commentaries (as well as Editorials, Different Views, Public Health and the Law, Public Health Then and Now, and even some letters to the editor) are indexed in Index Medicus and other indexing publications. Placement in one of the other section of the Journal is a matter of editorial convenience rather than an indication of importance.

The second misperception is that the Journal does not want and will not publish “policy” papers, i.e., papers not based on statistically sound scientific research. This misapprehension may have arisen because, since 1975, when this
Editor took over, we have rejected a number of submissions which we felt were ill digested and poorly written opinion pieces shedding no new light on well trodden ground. We will continue to reject that kind of policy paper. But we are anxious to publish well documented critical analyses of policy that shed new light on old ground or that break new ground. We have received few such manuscripts to date, but those we receive, we cherish. They may be published in the Articles, Commentary, Different Views, or Public Health Briefs section of the Journal, depending on editorial decision.

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REFERENCES

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The Joint Editorial Board of Standard Methods for the Examination of Water and Wastewater has announced that work on the 17th Edition is beginning. Joint Task Groups are being formed to review and revise existing analytical methods contained in the 16th Edition of Standard Methods (which will appear in mid-1984), as well as to prepare new methods for the 17th Edition. Standard Methods has an impressive 80-year long history of voluntary, cooperative effort to establish standardized analytical techniques essential to efficient water and wastewater treatment and to the protection of the public health. Joint Task Group members are being sought for the continuation of this vital service.

Standard Methods is published jointly by the American Public Health Association (APHA), the American Water Works Association (AWWA), and the Water Pollution Control Federation (WPCF). The Joint Editorial Board includes a representative of each of the sponsoring societies and is chaired by Professor Lenore S. Clesceri; other members are Arnold E. Greenberg and R. Rhodes Trussell.

Interested individuals must submit a completed information form obtainable from the Secretary, Standards Methods, AWWA, 6666 W. Quincy Avenue, Denver, CO 80235. Candidates should be familiar with Standard Methods, technically competent in one or more analytical methodologies to be contained in the next edition, and able to devote the time required to fulfill the responsibilities of a Joint Task Group member. Current members of the APHA, AWWA and WPCF Standard Methods Committee will be contacted individually concerning participation in the 17th Edition and need not respond to this notice.

Pioneering Conference on ‘Teaching Nursing Home’ Scheduled

The National Institute on Aging and the Beverly Foundation will jointly present a pioneering conference on the Teaching Nursing Home, March 25–27, 1984, at the Vista International Hotel in Washington, DC. The conference will bring together specialists from a wide range of disciplines to discuss the ramifications and future of teaching nursing homes as centers of geriatric research, education, and clinical care.

The conference will review the current status of nursing homes in the US and existing Teaching Nursing Home models. Presenters will delve into the objectives, advantages and future of teaching nursing homes in stimulating geriatric research, enriching and extending geriatric educational opportunities and raising the level of care in long-term care facilities. Attendance at the conference will be recognized for continuing education credits by the American Association of Family Physicians, American College of Nursing Home Administrators, and the American Medical Association.

A registration fee of $100 ($30 for full-time students) made payable to the Beverly Foundation covers the costs of receptions, continental breakfasts, luncheons, and the banquet. Enrollment will be limited to 200 people. For more information, write the Beverly Foundation, 1445 Huntington Dr., South Pasadena, CA 91030, or call (213) 441-1114.