

FROM THE EDITOR

LIVING OUT OF YOUR COMFORT ZONE: WRITE LIKE NO ONE IS WATCHING

Joseph Conigliaro, MD, MPH, Editor in Chief, SGIM Forum

In September, my wife and I spent two weeks in Provence, France, hiking with close friends in the Verdon Gorge and the Luberon. This was the first time that we attempted a “hiking vacation,” so we were excited to try something new. We had taken several cycling vacations over the last several years and thought that this would be a good change. I figured if I can do 20-50 miles per day on a bike for 8 to 10 days, I could hike 9 to 12 miles per day on my feet for 10 days. I was wrong. Mind you, we had a fantastic time. It’s just that the experience was a reminder of taking things for granted and putting yourself out there, out of your comfort zone.

My goal in sharing my vacation destination with you is not to impress with the interesting places we visit but to share the lesson that I took from this experience and relate it to my career as an academic general internist. Like many in our field, before training, I possessed a narrow view of the opportunities available to internists. I was also not familiar with academic general internal medicine as a career. The idea of academic work and the scholarly activities related to it were not something I was ever exposed to. In fact, the thought of a career that depended on my communication skills, either written or oral, would have been anathema to me. Those skills were never my strongest and still something that I continue to find challenging today. It took a few role models and a national SGIM meeting to make me understand.

In these columns, I have often mentioned the influence of the mentors that have had an impact on me early on and why I am an academic general internist. These individuals, whether I encountered them in college, medical school, residency or beyond, have motivated me to put myself out there. They would share advice on not only what to write or how to write but also where to submit it. Peer-reviewed journals were always the ultimate destination for my best work and where it will presumably have the greatest impact. We always aimed for the journal with the highest impact factor. One thing I have noticed, however, during the time I have been *Forum* editor, is that many established colleagues and mentors today try to discourage early faculty from submitting their work to *Forum* or other non-peer reviewed

publications because it lacks an impact factor. I have to admit that if you want to publish a primary research related article, *Forum* is not the place for it. I have even sent back manuscripts, encouraging the author to submit to a peer-reviewed journal. In the June 2018 *Forum*, Avital O’Glasser revisited Adam Gordon’s charge to submit to non-peer reviewed journals and they give ample reasons to do so.¹ I like to think of *Forum* as “semi peer reviewed.” That is, the editorial board critiques articles as to their appropriateness, style, and writing clarity but not with the intent to reject them but get them in a form suitable for publication. By no means do we accept every article. As I mentioned earlier, some articles are just not suitable for *Forum*. But we work hard to get those manuscripts that would be of interest to SGIM members into publishable shape.

Forum is also a great publication to start submitting your early work. It reaches the very people who are interested in what you do and you can share your experiences and expertise around the good work you do in your practice, research and educational activities. It’s also a great place to try publishing innovative and different types of articles, such as perspective pieces, opinions, and creative writing. We offer a variety of article types with easy and straightforward instructions.² I encourage both new and experienced faculty to consider *Forum* when thinking about where they want to submit something that’s a little bit out there or maybe a piece that might not seem so exciting but would be beneficial to our members.

In my current position as division chief, I am responsible for several young and not-so-young colleagues who have little experience in scholarly work and who struggle with their role as academic faculty. They are not convinced that they have anything to put out there that anyone wants to hear or read about. My job is to prove them wrong. Early on in my career, a colleague of mine gave me a book to help me and give me the confidence to unleash the inner writer inside. In her book, *Writing Down the Bones: Freeing the Writer Within*,³ Natalie Goldberg uses humor and practical suggestions to motivate and prompt those

continued on page 2



FROM THE EDITOR *(continued from page 1)*

not accustomed to writing down their thoughts to successfully do so. The book is fun and easy to read and I often reread sections of it when I hit a little writer's block. I am also happy to offer suggestions on manuscripts at any stage of development.

The December issue is a great example of *Forum's* value, both to the reader and to the writer. In this issue, Drs. Karches and Pomeranz explore the effect that the electronic medical record has had on the physician-patient relationship from

an ethical viewpoint. In two descriptive yet informative pieces, Dr. David Dugdale shares his experience taking a sabbatical in Germany, offering some practical tips for anyone interested in doing the same and Dr. Tiffany Leung describes her experience when asked to respond to a patient in need on an international flight, also taking the opportunity to provide helpful information. All that and two intriguing cases await you.

Where else are you going to find all that?

References

1. O'Glasser A. Would you, could you...Write a non-peer-reviewed article any day? *SGIM Forum*. 2018;41(6):4-5,7.
2. SGIM. Information for authors. <https://www.sгим.org/publications/sgim-forum/information-for-authors>. Accessed October 31, 2018.
3. Goldberg N. *Writing Down the Bones: Freeing the Writer Within*. Rev Ed. New York: Shambhala; 2010.

SGIM