

Seventy Years of Change but Staying True to Our Roots

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In 1948, when the American Academy of Neurology (AAN) was founded, there were no journals devoted exclusively to neurology.¹ To fill this void, and urged by Robert Wartenberg, a committee that included Abe B. Baker, Howard D. Fabing, Francis M. Forster, and Adolf L. Sahs “made plans for establishing a neurologic journal, and appointed Russell N. DeJong editor-in-chief and Webb Haymaker associate editor.”^{1,2} *Neurology* was launched under the auspices of the Board of Trustees of the AAN in January 1951 “as a medium for the prompt publication of articles dealing with the structure, function, and pathology of the nervous system, including the therapeutic aspects of such pathologic states, and to stimulate individual investigations in these various fields.”³ The first issue included, in addition to an editorial by DeJong, 2 research articles, an article describing a clinical diagnostic observation, several topical reviews, a report of a clinical pathologic conference from Boston City Hospital, and 4 book reviews. For the first 2 years, the journal was published bimonthly, and a yearly subscription was \$8.

Over the past 70 years, *Neurology*'s growth has been tremendous. Key events in the history of the journal are described at [NPub.org/milestones](https://npub.org/milestones). Of all neurology journals, it has the highest Eigenfactor score, a measure of the journal's importance to the wider scientific community, and it garners more citations than any other journal in the field (109,915 in 2020).⁴ In 1977, it had 460 submissions (5% from outside the United States)⁵; between September 2020 and October 2021, it received 5,772 (69% international). The acceptance rate was around 30%–40% for several decades, but gradually declined, and last year it was 11%.⁶ The frequency of publication has increased from 6 to 48 issues every year. For the first 3 decades, the journal was managed by the editor-in-chief, an associate editor, and an editorial assistant. However, the number of manuscripts and the opportunities provided by electronic media meant that “the days of a preeminent editor-in-chief selecting reviewers for every paper, often from memory, individually editing copy, supported by staff faxing manuscripts to all parts of the globe, were coming to an end.”⁷ The number of editors and editorial staff gradually increased and the editorial masthead now includes 44 editors in various capacities. Between 1951 and 2009, the editorial office was based at the editor-in-chief's institution.^{2,5-9} In 2009, the AAN decided to create a central editorial office at its headquarters.¹⁰ The current editorial staff has 17 members: 13 based in Minneapolis and 4 working remotely. Some of them have been with the journal for more than 20 years.

Since its founding, *Neurology* has relied on the advice of the dedicated members of the editorial board and thousands of peer reviewers to select which papers to publish. The original editorial board had 11 members, including 1 woman,¹ but over time it expanded, and the current board includes 128 members, 65 of whom are women, and 44% are based outside the United States.¹¹ Over the past 6 months, 1,790 volunteer peer reviewers provided the journal with 5,379 reviews.

Over the years, *Neurology* expanded, and it is now the flagship of a family of journals that includes *Neurology: Clinical Practice* (founded in 2010); *Neurology: Neuroimmunology & Neuroinflammation* (2012); and *Neurology: Genetics* (2013). These 4 journals complement other

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AAN publications. In 2007, *Neurology* launched a weekly podcast that has, on average, 15,805 weekly downloads from listeners in 175 countries.¹²

In 1952, the journal was awarded a certificate of excellence for the attractiveness of its format and design by the American Institute of Graphic Arts.¹³ Since then, the journal has undergone many style and format changes, but it has always retained its character as the “Green Journal.” Perhaps one of the most noticeable changes was the inclusion of a short version of all research articles in the print version, with an expanded full version that appears only online.¹⁴

Neurology was one of the first journals to use electronic submissions and manuscript processing. Every issue of the journal since 1951 was posted online in 2006. That year, *Neurology* also started posting some of the accepted full articles online.⁸ Since 2017, the full-length expanded version of all research articles only appears online. This is the canonical version of the journal. There were 11,573,657 visits to the *Neurology.org* website in the 12-month period from October 2020 to October 2021, from a total of 5,520,421 different users, and only 44% were located in the United States.

Neurology has played a role educating the next generation of editorial leaders since 2004, when it launched the Resident & Fellow Section.⁸ This is an editorial team of more than 20 neurology residents and fellows (20% international) who review, edit, and publish case reports and opinion pieces and education research papers. Submissions to the section have grown from 12 in 2004 to 1,133 in 2020. Past members have gone on to other editorial roles, at *Neurology* and elsewhere. In 2019, the journal also established an assistant editor program aimed at early career academic neurologists who want to learn more about editorial activities.¹⁵ Future initiatives are being planned.

Over the decades, the subjects and complexity of the papers published in *Neurology* have mirrored the developments in clinical neuroscience. It is illustrative, for example, that in 1975 the journal published only 6 papers on neuroimmunology and 3 on CT imaging, yet in 1985 it included 35 papers focusing on CT imaging, 11 on PET, 12 on MRI, and 23 on neuroimmunology. Notably, in that year it did not publish any articles on molecular genetics, a nascent field that grew steadily over the next decade.⁵ More recent issues have included studies that employ increasingly complex methods such as whole genome sequencing, machine learning algorithms, and voxel-based morphometry. These elegant studies

advance our fundamental understanding of neurologic disease, but the complexity of the methods used makes interpretation of the results challenging for those who are not experts in a narrow field. Editors of *Neurology* must decide on the relevance of each study for a heterogeneous audience of clinical neuroscientists and neurologists. When faced with challenge of deciding whether a paper falls within the scope of the journal, my predecessors and I have always followed the approach summarized by Abe B. Baker:

*As neurology became more and more identified as a scientific discipline in its own right, so the editorial content of Neurology became more scientific and less obviously clinical. But Dr. DeJong always maintained the rule that every paper, even one dealing with basic research, still must have some interest to the clinician to justify publication in Neurology.*²

This focus on clinical neurology will propel us into the future.

As we celebrate the 70th anniversary of the journal, I thank past and present readers, authors, reviewers, editorial board members, editorial staff, editors, and AAN staff and leaders who have helped make *Neurology* the journal that it is today. Happy anniversary, *Neurology*!

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