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Medical Journals, Diversity and Cultural Sensitivity

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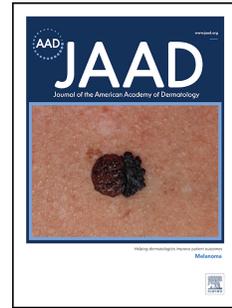
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Medical Journals, Diversity and Cultural Sensitivity

The JAAD's mission is to help dermatologists improve patient outcomes. We publish a wide variety of articles with direct impact on patient care. As part of that mission, it is important to address skin disorders that affect patients of varying backgrounds. Language can become emotionally charged, especially when dealing with aspects of human sexuality, ethnicity, and religion. Words and phrases may carry connotations that vary widely among cultural groups and a phrase that seems innocuous to one group may be highly offensive to another. The AAD and the JAAD have made considerable progress to help address the need of all patient groups. This letter will address some of those efforts.

Our editorial board is chosen from our best reviewers. Decisions are data-driven, rather than capricious, and based on aggregate data on timeliness and quality of reviews. Data captured by our editorial system includes time to acceptance of the review assignment, number of reviews completed, number declined, timeliness of reviews, quality of the review and number of reviews that are late or uninvited. We are also reaching out to diverse groups within our specialty, letting them know that we want them involved in their journal and sharing details on how the board is chosen, as encouraging broad involvement in the journal is the best way to ensure the quality of future editorial boards. We periodically review the breadth of expertise within our editorial board and also review for inclusiveness including both domestic and international representation.

We are taking steps to help ensure the diversity of mentors within our JAAD mentorship program and have established a Cultural Sensitivities Work Group as an added layer of review

for articles dealing with human sexuality, gender, race, politics and other sensitive topics. The workgroup provides useful feedback to editors and authors on issues ranging from the choice of language to possible reviewer bias.

We are working on collections of articles and images that focus on various populations, and a tool kit to help authors produce better photographic images of various skin tones. We have also created a resource toolkit for new reviewers and editors touching on topics from statistics to professional standards, cultural sensitivity and diversity. The toolkit will serve as a valuable resource for those new to publishing who want to do the best job they can in representing our specialty and providing timely and fair peer reviews. We are disseminating links and encouraging all members of the JAAD board and every reviewer to engage in independent learning regarding bias and cultural sensitivity. Consistent displays of bias will result in dismissal of a reviewer from their responsibilities. We recognize that many of these issues are highly charged and well-intentioned efforts can easily run awry by underestimating the emotional impact that accompanies these issues.¹

Evidence suggests that research studies are more effective when researchers and participants share a common language and culture and there is a growing body of recommendations of how best to approach differences in language and culture, avoid the use of offensive language, and remind us all that medicine is a higher calling that comes with ethical obligations.^{2 3 4} We are all in this together. and we welcome your participation and suggestions.

¹ Willen, S.S. Confronting a “Big Huge Gaping Wound”: Emotion and Anxiety in a Cultural Sensitivity Course for Psychiatry Residents. *Cult Med Psychiatry* **37**, 253–279 (2013). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11013-013-9310-6>

² Irvine F., Roberts G., Bradbury-Jones C. (2008) The Researcher as Insider Versus the Researcher as Outsider: Enhancing Rigour Through Language and Cultural Sensitivity. In: Liamputtong P. (eds) *Doing Cross-Cultural Research*. Social Indicators Research Series, vol 34. Springer, Dordrecht. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-8567-3_3

³ Latting JK. Soliciting Individual Change in an Interpersonal Setting: The Case of Racially or Sexually Offensive Language. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*. 1993;29(4):464-484.

⁴ Kirch DG, Vernon DJ. The Ethical Foundation of American Medicine: In Search of Social Justice. *JAMA*. 2009;301(14):1482–1484. doi:10.1001/jama.2009.456