

Updates from the *NNR* Early Career Editorial Program

In the fall of 2023, ASNR's premier academic journal *Neurorehabilitation and Neural Repair* (*NNR*) [launched its Early Career Editorial Program](#) to provide emerging neurorehabilitation scientists and clinicians insight into the editorial board process and foster career development through interactions with the *NNR* editorial team. From a competitive pool of applicants, [three ASNR Members were selected to participate in the program](#): Dr. Sam Nemanich (Marquette University), Dr. Daniele Piscitelli (University of Connecticut), and Dr. Natalia Sánchez (Chapman University). As the end of their second year in the three-year program approaches, we were excited to connect with them again to hear more about their experiences and what they have learned.

Evolving Responsibilities

In the first year of the program, participants focused on honing their skills as reviewers. During this time, they engaged with the Editor-in-Chief, Dr. Randy Nudo, and other Editors to discuss their reviews, learn strategies for evaluating the scientific quality and rigor of submitted manuscripts, and discuss review styles and approaches. "It's been enlightening to see the breadth of research being submitted, and to identify emerging trends in the field. Additionally, observing how different reviewers approach the peer review process has been eye-opening, especially since, as reviewers, we rarely receive feedback on our own reviews. Seeing multiple review perspectives on a single manuscript, without the added pressure of being the author, has deepened my understanding of the review process," explained Dr. Sánchez.

As the participants gained more experience as reviewers, their roles expanded in the second year of the program, allowing them to work more independently. The three participants have been involved in deciding whether manuscripts are a good fit for the journal's mission and should be sent out for review, identifying appropriate reviewers for manuscripts, managing editorial timelines, and assessing and synthesizing reviewer feedback to make recommendations for editorial decisions. "This involvement in the decision-making process has been a valuable learning opportunity, giving me a better understanding of the editorial workflow and the balance required between reviewer feedback, scientific rigor, and the journal's mission," noted Dr. Piscitelli.

In the upcoming third year of the program, Drs. Nemanich, Piscitelli, and Sánchez will transition to becoming regular members of the *NNR* Editorial Board, and they will continue to contribute to the journal's peer review and global dissemination of high-quality research findings and expert perspectives.

Lessons Learned

Many academic programs provide limited structured training on peer review and the editorial process. Through the *NNR* Early Career Editorial Program, participants learned a wide variety of critical editorial skills. They have become more familiar with the editorial process, including

how to critically assess submitted manuscripts, select and invite appropriate reviewers, and manage the peer review process. Beyond improving their own skills in providing effective, fair, and rigorous reviews, the Early Career Editors have learned how to manage disagreements between reviewers and authors, critically evaluate reviewer comments to provide balanced and constructive feedback to the Editor-in-Chief, and make informed and unbiased editorial decisions. “I have also learned first-hand the challenges of maintaining rigorous peer review of scientific evidence. Without the dedicated efforts of reviewers and editors, scientific progress would be severely limited. Peer review is the cornerstone of scientific progress, and everyone in the field should be contributing toward making peer review more effective,” remarked Dr. Nemanich.

Reviewing and critiquing the writing and research of others can also help early-career scientists and clinicians identify areas to improve in their own writing and research projects. “I’ve also gained insight into the nuances of scientific writing and the importance of clarity, rigor, and innovation in research,” said Dr. Sánchez. She continued, “The program has definitely made me a better author and a better reviewer. I now approach manuscript writing and reviewing with a more strategic and thoughtful mindset.”

In addition to targeting specific skills that are necessary for Editorial Board Members, the program introduces participants to behind-the-scenes operations and logistics involved in publishing an academic journal. For high-quality peer-reviewed journals like *NNR*, it is critical to understand and track metrics like impact factor and journal rankings, and a lot of different pieces have to come together each month to publish a new issue.

Career Impacts

For many academic journals, membership on the Editorial Board is limited to individuals who are at mid-career or late-career stages. Thus, *NNR*’s Early Career Editorial program provides a rare opportunity for early-career professionals in the field to be part of the editorial process and learn from the distinguished members of the Editorial Board. “My professional network has greatly expanded through my interactions and meetings as part of this program. By seeing the cutting-edge science submitted to the journal and the overall trends in the field, I am a more well-rounded scientist,” Dr. Nemanich indicated. Being part of this program has also opened doors to other mentorship and career development opportunities for the participants, all of whom are junior faculty members.

The *NNR* Early Career Editorial Program provides a unique structured and mentored approach to learning the ins and outs of being a scientific reviewer and an editorial board member, as well as insights into what is going on in the field outside of one’s particular area of expertise. Dr. Piscitelli reflected that, “these experiences have enhanced my critical thinking and strengthened my own skills as a reviewer and author, providing me with a broader perspective on emerging trends and priorities in the field of neurorehabilitation.”

Further, selection to participate in this competitive program highlights the merit of these three individuals and signifies a high level of achievement, motivation, and potential for contributing to

the field. “My career goals will now include other editorial board positions, offering another way to provide service to the field and increase my overall scientific network,” indicates Dr. Nemanich. Completion of this program will be a testament to Dr. Nemanich, Piscitelli, and Sánchez’s dedication to academic peer review and an indicator of their advanced editorial skills.

Advice for Early-Career Neurorehabilitation Professionals

Through their participation in *NNR*’s Early Career Editorial Program, each participant has gained valuable new perspectives and received expert advice from members of *NNR*’s Editorial Board. Dr. Nemanich shared that he was advised that, “reading and reviewing others’ work is one of the best ways to improve your own science and writing skills.” This important advice is something that everyone reading this article can apply in their own careers. Early-career faculty can learn a lot by taking the time to read and think critically about articles from other researchers.

For Dr. Sánchez, a particularly helpful piece of advice for reviewing manuscripts came from one of the Associate Editors she interacted with in the program. “Begin with the reference list. This approach offers a quick but powerful way to assess whether the manuscript is grounded in current and relevant science. It helps determine if the authors are engaging with the latest research, whether prior studies published in *Neurorehabilitation and Neural Repair* are cited, indicating alignment with the journal’s scope and whether the theoretical framework is supported by robust evidence,” she related. Since implementing this strategy in her own reviews, Dr. Sánchez mentioned that she is better able to evaluate the scientific context and relevance of a manuscript early on in the review process, allowing for a more informed and efficient review. Reviewing the references also provides insights into the authors’ positioning in the field gives her a chance to identify potential gaps or particular strengths in the authors’ arguments.

One of the most beneficial messages that Dr. Piscitelli is taking away from this program is to “always to consider the broader impact of research when evaluating a manuscript.” He was advised that, “it is important not only to assess methodological rigor but also to consider how the work advances the field and ultimately benefits patients.” Embracing this perspective has helped Dr. Piscitelli make more thoughtful editorial decisions, and it has also influenced how he is approaching his own research.

Highlights of the Early Career Editorial Program Experience:



Dr. Natalia Sánchez

“It’s been an excellent and truly enriching experience. Having Dr. Randy Nudo, a researcher whose work is foundational to the field of neurorehabilitation, as a mentor is a privilege. His guidance has provided deep insights not only into the editorial workings of *Neurorehabilitation and Neural Repair (NNR)*, but also into broader trends and challenges in neurorehabilitation.

Working alongside Daniele and Sam as peer Early-Career Editors has also been a highlight. Our shared experiences have fostered a strong sense of collaboration and mutual support, helping us navigate the common challenges and experiences faced both as junior faculty and also as Early Career Editors. Finally, meeting and interacting with Senior and Associate Editors has also been incredibly valuable. These relationships, formed through virtual mentoring sessions and strengthened during the ASNR Annual Meeting, have contributed to our professional growth.”



Dr. Sam Nemanich

“This experience has been very rewarding. I am fortunate to be involved as an editor at a very early stage in my career. Interacting with Randy, Natalia, and Daniele has been an enjoyable experience. I have also gained new colleagues in Natalia and Daniele given our shared experience in the program. My network has also expanded through interactions with other members of the Editorial Board during training and at the ASNR Annual Meeting.”



Dr. Daniele Piscitelli

“My experience as an Early Career Editorial Board member has been truly exciting. I feel that I am actively contributing to the mission of Neurorehabilitation and Neural Repair by engaging in the publication and peer review process from the editorial perspective, which is very different from my usual role as an author. This experience has given me a stronger sense of responsibility and has broadened my vision as a scientist, reinforcing my ultimate goal of advancing research that improves the lives of people with neurological conditions.”

The Early Career Editorial Program is just one of the many ways that ASNR supports the training and career development of early-career neurorehabilitation professionals. It provides an invaluable learning experience and a unique chance to see the publishing process from the inside, contribute to the advancement of the field, and build lasting professional relationships with peer early-career editors and people who have shaped the field of neurorehabilitation. [The next call for applications to the NNR Early Career Editorial Program is now open](#). Early-career clinicians and scientists with an interest in editorial work are encouraged to apply. Visit our [Career Development page](#) to learn about ASNR's other career development resources and opportunities.