A Message from the New Editor-in-Chief

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It is my honor to assume the role of editor-in-chief for *Review Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* (RJAD). Thanks in large part to the passion and vision of the previous and founding editor-in-chief, Dr. Johnny L. Matson, RJAD has grown significantly since its inception in 2013, enhancing its role as a forum for high-quality reviews of empirical literature in the field of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and related developmental disorders. On behalf of Springer and the community of RJAD readers, I would like to thank Dr. Matson and the entire team of associate editors and editorial board members whose service to the journal has been imperative at expanding its stature in the scientific community. It is my hope that I can continue to fulfill their vision of publishing scholarly reviews of relevant topics across the broad interdisciplinary research fields of ASD. I would also like to specifically thank Jennifer Hadley (Springer's senior journals editor) and everyone at Springer for their ongoing assistance and support with the journal and with the editor-in-chief transition.

The major task for RJAD now is to raise its quality and impact to assist with becoming the preeminent specialty journal whereby scholars across the broad field of ASD and associated developmental disorders aim to submit integrative reviews of the literature. To achieve this goal, steps need to occur to make RJAD more attractive to potential authors and to potential readers. Therefore, over the coming years, changes to RJAD's structure and formatting will occur to aid the process of furthering the journal's growth. I would like to highlight three specific areas where readers and potential submitting authors will begin to see targeted changes.

The first area to address is ensuring the quality of articles we publish. To do so, over the next year, RJAD will move to predominantly accept objective, critical, and integrative data-driven reviews of the literature (i.e., scoping reviews, systematic reviews, mixed method reviews, meta-syntheses, and

meta-analyses) while limiting the acceptance of narrative reviews. When published, narrative reviews will be relegated to brief reviews of a focused topic with the intent to identify gaps in the literature, to provide details on an emerging theory/research area, policy updates, article commentaries, or to teach or detail an important technology, clinical application, etc. This major change is necessary to minimize subjectivity and to increase transparency of the reviews RJAD publishes. To that end, you will see in the next few months further information detailing this change on our website as well as clear instructions in our "guide for authors."

Another area to improve upon is to ensure that RJAD publishes work that is truly reflective of the broad and interdisciplinary field of ASD and related developmental disorders. The field of ASD ranges from both basic and applied science and spans across many disciplines including but not limited to medicine, psychology, neuroscience, education, applied behavior analysis, computer science, epidemiology, basic science, and allied health sciences. Topics range from basic to applied and may focus on areas across the lifespan including intervention, genetics, diagnosis, incidence, academics, pharmacology, training, assessment, neurophysiology, therapeutic outcomes, quality of life, family needs, psychological processes, cognition, core symptoms, and associated conditions. RJAD will welcome submissions across the field as this will ensure our journal is truly reflective of broad range of innovative research occurring and will result in RJAD being more appealing to a wider reader and potential author base. One specific topic that RJAD should look to target growth in is in other developmental disorders (e.g., Fragile X, Rett's disorder, Down syndrome). Since our first issue in March 2014, RJAD has only published 2 articles solely focused on a developmental disorder other than ASD. The expansion of our field depends upon a broader appreciation of the range of developmental disorders which may occur as well as their overlap with ASD. Similarly, RJAD will continue to highlight specific topics through invited special issues curated by expert guest editors who can aid in developing a collection of reviews to highlight and summarize important work that is occurring across the field. Finally, RJAD will aim to ensure that our

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associate editors and editorial board members are also reflective of the broad and diverse field of ASD and developmental disorders both topically and geographically.

Finally, to ensure that high-quality work continues to be published by RJAD, we must improve our double-blind peer review process. Our journal website approximates that it presently takes 85 days from submission to first decision and 269 days from submission to acceptance. While the worldwide pandemic has significantly hindered the peer review process for RJAD as it has most academic journals, we can do better. As I reflect on my own experiences in submitting manuscripts to journals for peer review, it is extremely frustrating to wait an excessively long time to receive feedback. The outcomes of delays in the peer review process have many trickle-down effects for the author/research team and for the journal. If a journal is fraught with processing delays, potential authors will be less likely to submit their manuscripts for peer review consideration. RJAD should set a goal of rapid reviews of no more than 6–8 weeks from the first day of article submission to its first decision. To achieve this goal, there are numerous strategies that we will begin to put into place. First, we must expand our associate editor panel from 6 to a minimum of 10 which mimics larger journals which may have anywhere from 8–15 or more associate editors. Having a larger number of associate editors reduces editorial burden by spreading out responsibilities. Furthermore, our associate editors should be diverse in their area of research and/or clinical focus. By having a wider range of areas of focus being represented across associate editors enables us to expand our reviewer pool due to a more greater familiarity with the literature as well as scholars and/or clinicians who are ideal peer reviewer candidates. Next, our editorial board must not be a place of honorarium without responsibility. Rather, members of our editorial board should actively contribute to RJAD's growth

through activities such as performing peer review duties, providing suggestions to improve the journal's standing, serving as or soliciting guest editors for relevant special issues, submitting articles for consideration when appropriate, and networking on behalf of the journal. Finally, RJAD will directly benefit from a new author dashboard Springer Nature will soon launch. This new dashboard will privately and independently allow corresponding authors real-time access to the status of their manuscript via a peer review timeline (e.g., the recruitment of a reviewer, when reviewer reports are submitted) and will also provide resources and services that can further promote their research upon publication (e.g., manuscript editing services, video and visual abstracts). This new service will assist RJAD in being transparent in the peer review process and will provide authors with more assurances of the thorough yet efficient review of their manuscripts.

In sum, I am excited and humbled by the opportunity to serve as RJAD's new editor-in-chief. The responsibility for assuming the stewardship of RJAD is not one that I take lightly. My aim is to work to enhance RJAD's impact and visibility in the field through strategic planning and through collaboration with the journal's Springer representatives, associate editors, and editorial board. I believe that good science occurs when there is a dedicated team with a coordinated and shared focus, and as such I aim to bring to RJAD that same philosophy. I will similarly welcome all feedback from RJAD's readers, as it is your support that keeps RJAD going and growing. I look forward to working for and with you. Peace, health, and blessings to you.

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