

From the Editor

State Journals of Public Health

ⁱ McKinley Thomas, Editor, *JGPHA*

During the 78th annual meeting and conference held in September, 2007 I had the opportunity of sharing my experiences as Editor of the *Journal of the Georgia Public Health Association* with a group of colleagues from around the state. This session was an important one for three reasons. First, it served as a chance to advertise the *Journal* given that anecdotal data suggest that many health professionals in Georgia do not realize a) the availability of the *Journal* as a method of communicating ideas or b) the scrutiny with which articles are selected for publication, leading to authors selecting some other professional journal as a springboard for sharing research, best practices, etc. Second, it offered attendees a chance to learn about the process through which the *Journal* is developed, potentially augmenting the pool of both authors and manuscript reviewers.

Currently, the *Journal* has a number of diverse and qualified health professionals who have graciously volunteered their time to review and critique articles submitted for publication. With regard to authorship, the Association has received a total of 25 manuscripts since the *Journal's* inception in 2005. Submissions have emerged from around Georgia as well as from other states such as Texas and California. Of submitted articles, 16 (64%) have been published electronically after varying levels of revision (See Table 1).

With regard to revisions, the Editor believes that it is much more important to work with a potential author in cultivating their ideas (ideas which will be shared with other health professionals in the state) than it is to simply review and reject a manuscript. Granted some submissions will simply not be appropriate for the *Journal*, however, those that are should be thoroughly examined by reviewers and critiqued in an effort to

develop a paper which will enhance public health in the state of Georgia.

Finally, the presentation served as an opportunity to solicit feedback from others regarding the scope, online management, and general particulars specific to the *Journal*.

As a basis for discussion within this realm the Editor investigated what other state health associations had accomplished with regard to research-based journals. Currently, there are a total of 55 APHA affiliate states / regions listed on the American Public Health Association website, including Puerto Rico, US Virgin Islands, New York City and New York State, as well as both Northern and Southern California Health Associations. Each affiliate organization (with the exception of Puerto Rico and US Virgin Islands) was contacted via email and asked two questions. First, each state association was asked if a research-based journal was provided to members, and second, if so, was such a publication available electronically or in print format. Of 53 messages sent, 24 were returned yielding a response rate of 45%. Of the messages returned, Florida, Michigan, and Nevada reported offering their members a research-based journal, all of which were available online, in electronic format. In collaboration with Central Washington University, Washington State reported plans to implement such a journal in 2008. For states who did not respond an additional effort was made to secure information directly through state-specific web sites. Each non responding state (with the exception of Delaware) maintains their own website, primarily independent of some

Table 1: Articles and Submitted and Published, 2005-Present

	Submissions	Accepted	%
Edition 1	6	4	67
Edition 2	9	4	44
Edition 3	6	5	83
Edition 4	4	3	75
Total	25	16	64

larger organization, such as a medical school or university. A total of 28 state association websites were examined for evidence of a research-based journal. Only one such journal was located in Texas. The *Texas Public Health Journal* is a quarterly publication, available only to members and only in print format.

In essence, only five states currently offer health association members a research-based journal, primarily in electronic format and available online, with one state, Washington, planning such an endeavor during the coming year (See Map 1).

Though data were not systematically collected, it appears that many states offer their members a newsletter, published at varying times of the year, as well as other online documents such as position papers, policy white papers, and links to state public health agencies.

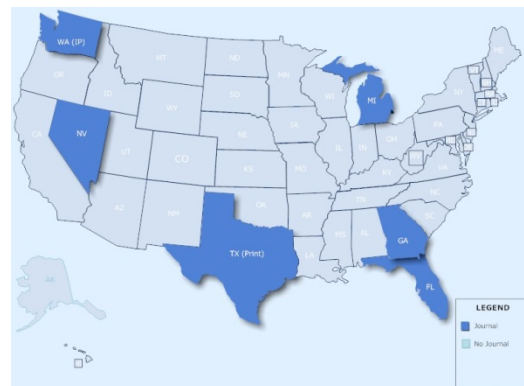
As the reader may remember, the 78th annual meeting and conference in Savannah was held in conjunction with the Southern Health Association affording the Editor an opportunity to speak with representatives from other states about potential collaborative opportunities as well as the overall importance of sharing state-specific research undertakings with organizational members. Information gleaned from numerous conversations with state representatives is evident in the two main changes made by the *Journal* over the previous few months. First, manuscripts selected for publication are added to the website as they are accepted and revised according to critical review. Second, the journal has a new web-based interface with is more in line with other research journals published exclusively online.

Now, why all this concern for state-based research journals? Three benefits of such a publication come to mind.

- Research-based journals supported by state public health associations offer unique insights into cutting edge research, best practices, and programming which has the potential of being used in real-world situations by others around the state.

- State-based manuscripts offer reasonable and timely approaches to regional public health concerns and address issues that are not routinely addressed in other, more broad research publications.
- Journals produced by state health associations serve as another opportunity for organizations to present themselves as members of a professional discipline. Such journals also serve as a platform for further discourse and networking, both during annual meetings as well as throughout the year.

Map 1: Print or Electronic Research Journals, US, 2007



With proper management and support from public health association members, state-specific journals of research may serve an important tool for sharing information, data, and scientific and community undertakings with health personnel in the region. This premise is based upon the very nature of public health, the one characteristic that makes our efforts more prone to success when approaching health concerns: Collaboration.

i COORESPONDING AUTHOR:
 Mercer University School of Medicine
 Department of Community Medicine
 1550 College Street
 Macon, Georgia 31207-0001
 478-301-5547
 thomas_bm@mercer.edu