A First Look at Nurse Editors' Compensation

Executive Summary

- While the compensation for many nursing roles is published and accessible, no data have heretofore been available on monetary compensation for nurse editors.
- Answers to questions about compensation contained in a 108-question international survey of 88 editors of nursing journals, which was designed to learn about all aspects of the role of editor, are described.
- This study provides a first look at editor compensation.

There is a long history of transparency in nursing salaries for most nursing positions in the United States. Salary surveys are published regularly in nursing journals and magazines, on the World Wide Web, and by professional groups such as the American Association of University Professors (AAUP, 2006; Mason, 2007; O'Brien & Hartner, 2007). Open access to information about salary is not generally as available, however, for nurses who work in the private sector. Often an offer of salary in that setting relies on the negotiating skills of the nurse, informed by knowledge of what others in that role are being paid. The experiences reported here are the first detailed descriptions of how nurses who edit professional journals are compensated for their work.

In nursing, there has been little or no publication of salaries of nurse editors. Nurse editors are generally high-level nurses working at prominent levels in administrative, clinical, or faculty positions. Their powerful roles in the profession position them well to serve as gatekeepers to the nursing literature; they literally decide what will be published for the nursing profession.

Nursing editors work part time and full time, have other professional positions or not, and work varying amounts of hours weekly on their journals, depending on the size and frequency of the publication. Nurse editors' compensation is generally provided by publishing companies or by professional associations that own or publish the nursing journal. Nurse editors who work full time for publishing companies can be paid a salary, which would then include routine benefits. Part-time nurse editors are generally offered an "honorarium" for their editorial duties. Editors who are faculty members often use the honoraria as a part of their faculty salary or turn them over to their employers in lieu of grant funding or other type of payback to the university for time spent.

The Nurse Editor Role

Comprehensive data about the nurse editor role have only recently been published (Freda & Kearney, 2005a, 2005b; Kearney & Freda, 2005, 2006). The monetary compensation data reported here was collected as one element of the 108-question email survey used in the larger study, the overall purpose of which was to learn about the nurse editor role and the range of practices used by nurse editors. The study was also designed to give editors the opportunity to comment on their experiences as editors.

Data collection process. Nurses who had decision-making responsibilities for journal content and policy were the sample, along with associate editors who were empowered to make decisions for the journal. Institution review board approval was obtained from Albert Einstein College of Medicine. The authors identified 177 possible nursing editors through a search of international publishing Web sites, lists of conference attendees (including the International Academy of Nursing Editors), World Wide Web searches, and referrals from the editors contacted.

Email addresses were found for 164 editors; 137 responded and expressed willingness to participate. The survey was conducted using email, and all editors were assured anonymity. When email responses with completed surveys were returned, the email containing the name of the editor was immediately discarded. Each completed survey was assigned a number, and data analysis used that number as the only identifier. Separate responses about each journal were requested from those editors who edited more than one journal. Ultimately, data from 88 nurse editors (69 editors of U.S. journals and 19 editors from journals published outside the U.S.) were obtained. These 88 nurses were editors of 90 journals (two editors served as editors of two journals each), yielding a response rate of 66%.

Margaret Comerford Freda
Margaret H. Kearney
Table 1.
Questions Regarding Financial Compensation

1. What is the amount of your remuneration per year for your editorial duties (per journal)?
   Please type in amount (in U.S. dollars if possible)

2. How satisfied are you with your financial arrangement with your publisher?
   __________
   Very satisfied
   __________
   Satisfied
   __________
   Not satisfied (please type in reason):

3. Do you feel that your financial remuneration is sufficient for the work you do as an editor?
   __________
   Yes
   __________
   No
   __________
   Not sure

The editors in the study were an average age of 53; had over 20 years of experience in nursing and 8 years as editor; and reported needing 3 to 5 years to feel comfortable in the editor role. Editors were asked to designate their journal as "scholarly" (peer reviewed, publishing scholarly research only, or both research and practice articles) or "other" (magazine-type publications for nurses or newsletters) for the study. Sixty-eight percent of editors of scholarly journals (n=76) held a doctoral degree; 67% of editors of "other" publications including newsletters and magazines (n=12) were master's prepared. All of the editors surveyed felt their role was influential in maintaining scholarly excellence and evidence-based practice. Many noted the constant pressure of deadlines and dealing with poor writing from authors as work challenges.

Since nurse editor salaries have not heretofore been published, nurses who aspire to editor positions have virtually no data about what to expect for compensation. In this additional analysis of data from the survey, we sought to answer questions about editor salary, and how it varied based on other work characteristics. We examined salary by publication type ("scholarly" journal vs. "other" including nursing magazines), location of the publishing company (U.S. vs. outside the U.S.), number of hours worked/week, number of issues published/year, and number of submissions the editor received and processed/year.

What Do We Know About Nurse Editors' Compensation?

The survey of nurse editors asked several questions about financial compensation of nurse editors (see Table 1).

Interestingly, the survey as first constructed by the authors in late 2002 did not contain questions about money at all, but 11 international nurse editors who pilot tested the survey requested that this information be added. This was our first indication of how important the issue of compensation was to nursing editors themselves.

What are nurse editors currently paid? Very different work and compensation patterns were observed in the two groups of editors (scholarly journals and other publication types). Ninety-five percent of the 76 editors of scholarly journals were also employed in other positions aside from editing. Fifty-five percent of "other" publication editors (magazines, newsletters, nursing periodicals) were paid a salary by the publisher, and 46% of these editors had no other employment. The annual compensation for editors of all types of journals ranged from 0 to $80,000/year. The highest reported salary ($80,000) was an editor in the "magazine" category of publications. The lowest ($0) was reported by seven scholarly journal editors.

The mean annual compensation for editors of scholarly journals was $12,749 (range 0-$56,000), for a mean hours worked/week of 13.4 (range 1-50), and mean number of submissions/year of 78 (range 0-300). Only 31% felt that their compensation was sufficient for the work they did as editors, but level of satisfaction was not statistically related to the actual amount of compensation. For the "magazine" category, the mean yearly compensation was $39,000 (range $25,000-$80,000), with mean hours worked/week of 25.6 (range 10-50). Editors who reported working 1 to 15 hours/week made a mean of $10,095 (range 0-$38,000); those with 16 to 25 hours/week made a mean of $22,542 (range 0-$80,000); and those who reported over 25 hours/week made a mean of $40,386 (range $15,700-$60,000).

When hourly compensation was calculated by multiplying hours/week by 50 to create hours worked/year and dividing annual compensation by the hours worked/year, editors of scholarly journals made an average of $21/hour and editors of other publications made $44/hour. No differences in hourly compensation were found by association-owned versus publisher-owned journal, full-time versus part-time editor, or type of compensation arrangement (honorarium, self-employed with contract with publisher, or employed by publisher).

Editors of journals published in the United States made a yearly average of $15,000 (range 0-$56,000) and those whose journals were published outside the United States reported an average yearly compensation of $4,979/year (range 0-$15,700) when converted to U.S. dollars.

The two strongest predictors of higher pay were editing other than a scholarly journal, and publishing in the United States. Editors' compensation by location of publication is shown in Table 2, with editors outside the United States receiving far less compensation than U.S. editors. U.S. editors made more than three times what editors outside the United States were paid per hour.
Table 2. Editor Compensation by Country of Publication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Published in U.S.</th>
<th>Published outside U.S.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mean Annual Pay</td>
<td>$15,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>$0-$56,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hourly Rate*</td>
<td>$27/hour</td>
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<td></td>
<td>$4,949</td>
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<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>$0-$15,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hourly Rate*</td>
<td>$9/hour</td>
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</table>

* Calculated by determining hours/year by multiplying reported hours/week by 50 and dividing annual compensation by hours/year.

As would be expected, frequency of publication did affect compensation. Editors of scholarly journals which were published monthly had a mean salary of $27,800 (range $6,000-$55,000); bimonthly had a mean salary of $18,977 (range $0-$56,000); quarterly had a mean salary of $6,298 (range $0-$20,000); and other than monthly, bimonthly, or quarterly had a mean salary of $4,667 (range $0-$14,000). Editors of “other” nursing publications published monthly made a mean of $59,700 (range $36,000-$80,000), and those whose publication was published other than monthly reported a mean salary of $59,700 (range $36,000-$80,000).

Given the work involved in editing, we were surprised to find that seven editors reported receiving no compensation. Table 3 describes the seven editors who reported receiving no compensation at all for their editorial work on professional journals. Five out of seven worked on association journals. Most worked relatively few hours per week on their editing jobs.

In addition to the actual salary data collected, nursing editors were also asked to explain their answers in the survey. Not surprisingly for professionals who are accustomed to writing, they wrote copious comments. Some representative verbatim comments are found in Table 4. Many comments reflected the editors’ awareness that they would not be well paid for their editor role, but some were clearly unhappy with their lack of sufficient compensation for what they perceived as very challenging, high-pressure work.

Discussion

This is the first survey of nursing editor compensation. Nurse leaders in administration, practice, or academia who aspire to the role of nurse editor should use the information in this article to help in their decision making about future professional goals, or to better understand how to discuss compensation for editorial duties with potential employers such as publishers or professional associations. Since editors have never before had any published background information about what nurse editors are paid, it has not been possible for them to anticipate what they might be offered for the position, or to compare their salary to what others are being paid. With the publication of this study, however, current nurse editors can use this information to begin conversations with each other about the issue of editor compensation, and to inform their future negotiations with publishers and professional associations.

Recommendations. Based on this study of nurse editor roles and compensation, we have several recommendations.

1. Since nursing journals form the foundation for nursing practice and are indispensable for the profession, the best candidates for the job of editor should be found. Nurse editors are experienced, senior (often renowned in their profession), with multiple certifications and specialties, and a majority have doctoral preparation. Their work for nursing journals, therefore, deserves to be compensated justly. We recommend that nurse editors discuss the issue of monetary compensation openly among themselves, and with the publishers who pay their salaries or honoraria. Nursing pay for the position of editor should not be a secret, and nurses who do this work should understand how the compensation they are being offered was determined. We also recommend that nurse editors use the information in this article to renegotiate honoraria which they consider substandard.

2. Currently nurses who are asked to become editors have little or no background information about what to expect in compensation. The extreme example of this is our finding that some editors consider the job of editor as a voluntary contribution to the profession and are paid no money for their work. We are hopeful that the publication of this study will shine a light on the topic of monetary compensation for nurse editors, and that editors who receive no compensation will realize that they are in the minority of nurse editors. We recommend that nurse editor compensation be
Table 4.
Written Comments Made by Editors Explaining Their Survey Answers

<table>
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<th>Comment</th>
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<tr>
<td>“You must want to do it for more than just money.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I finally found a job that pays worse than nursing.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I’m paid 10% royalty on sales (after costs) of the number of issues sold (usually about U.S. $4,000).”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I’m paid $2,000 per issue plus expenses.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I have an operating budget of $20,000 per year to maintain office and staff, and cover expenses. In addition, I receive annually a check for a percentage of the royalties, which is shared with 4 associate and assistant editors. I decline to share the amount.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“It would be nice to get paid for the work I do, but I knew I wouldn’t get paid when I took the job on, so it’s unfair to complain. I also benefit from the networking etc. that comes as part of the job.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“RE: Office Budget – Only have enough $ to run office on bare shoestrings when you count monthly expenses to run office and then attendance at conventions, meetings that get you contacts, authors and subscribers. Again, it makes it very difficult for an individual working outside an organization to be an editor. If they worked in service delivery rather than academia there would be no way they could quit their job for the compensation when that’s the kind of people we also need as editors!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Although publishers want you to get out to conventions, network, etc. there’s no $ in budget to support that.”</td>
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<td>“Independent editors who work contractually have total burden on their shoulders. If I can’t do my job for a period of time due to illness, etc. then the publisher can pay someone to do it but it is my money! They use my “honorarium” to pay this other person although I’ve been editor for almost 10 years – there’s no benefits so you keep going regardless of what’s going on with your health or personal life.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Not satisfied, BUT MONEY IS NOT THE ONLY REWARD IN THIS WORK.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The amount is a pittance in comparison to the amount of time I give to the journal.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Editors are notoriously low paid relative to the expertise demanded of them. This seems to be expected as we do it for ‘the love of the job’ and journal publishing is apparently well known to provide a low return...”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I feel my salary is low for what I do.”</td>
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<td>“...doesn’t really pay me for time I invest.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I know that part of this is the pleasure of doing what I do, and understand that I can not be paid fairly for this.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“When I was asked to edit the journal, I was offered $3,000/year. I was expected to set up shop and run the journal, with zero assistance from the publisher, for 4 issues each year. I set up an email system for reviews and manuscripts to save money. I had to hire a postdoc to help me, and I sent her to conferences as payment (from my own personal finances). I wanted to give something to my reviewers to thank them, and sent them each a scientific paper (about publishing); this was expensive for over 80 reviewers, but I did it. In the end, I felt in no way compensated.”</td>
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</table>

more widely published, and that nurses who aspire to editorship know in advance of seeking the position what the proposed salary is, what nurse editor salaries are in general, and what factors were used to calculate the salary (for example, number of issues/year, number of pages/issue, circulation, advertising revenue, society or association standards) is based.

3. We recommend that additional research be done about nurse editor compensation, including what non-monetary compensation editors might receive (such as time back from university assignments or clinical work). Editors might value such non-monetary compensation highly, and therefore place less value on straight salary. Research should also be done with publishers to determine how they choose the compensation they offer to editors, and based on what variables they calculate salaries.

Conclusion

The majority of editors (69%) in this study felt that the pay they received was not sufficient compensation for the work involved in editing. There was a very wide variability in editors’ compensation, with editorial work being compensated in many different ways. In light of the fact that nurse editors are paid a low hourly rate in comparison to compensation they would receive as clinicians or academics, and that editor role acquisition seems to take 3 to 5 years, editors who are primarily employed at academic institutions should receive more recognition in time and support from those academic institutions.

Some questions could not be answered fully with this study, and should be investigated in further research. For instance, how does nursing editor compensation compare with physician editor compensation? What is a “fair” compensation for nursing editors? What are the valid variables which should be
considered in determining compensation? In addition to number of issues/year and number of hours worked/week, should the number of pages/issue, the journal circulation, the experience or prestige of the editor, the size of the publishing company, or the size of ancillary staff be considered? How can transparency in editor compensation be best accomplished? How can editors who are not satisfied with their compensation negotiate for change? What is the role of the publisher and the professional association in this issue?

Our hope is that this article could lead to a more open discussion about compensation among editors, and that we have provided necessary information for potential editors as they negotiate for an editor position. We especially hope that editors who are currently working for no compensation will become aware that they are in the minority among their peers.

REFERENCES

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Robert C. McIver
Circulation Manager

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