

When is an editorial not an editorial: when it is empirical research!

The purpose of this editorial is to provide a rejoinder to an empirical research article:

“Attitudes to Brexit: A survey of nursing and midwifery” that was published as an editorial online on 13 May 2018, in *JAN*, co-authored by Niall McCrae (NM) and Jonathan Portes (JP). We the authors, Andrew Clifton (AC) and David Banks (DB) did not read the article when it was first published. The article came to our attention on 23 May 2019, when a video of NM, an Editorial Board member of *JAN*, appeared online linking him to an incident at a Brexit Rally ([URL](#)). NM writes for *Politicalite*, the Bruges Group which was at the forefront for the campaign for the UK to leave the European Union (EU) and is a recent co-author on at least two occasions, with Roger Watson (RW) (Editor-in-Chief of *JAN*), on *The Conservative Woman* website. This is an organisation which claims to be part of a: “a counter-cultural offensive against the forces of Leftism, feminism and modernism – against the anti-family, authoritarian identity politics and ‘equality and diversity’ ideology sweeping through the country’s institutions”.

Why this rejoinder? On reading the McCrae and Portes article about nurses and midwifery students’ attitudes to Brexit we were surprised to see a full-blown empirical research paper masquerading as an editorial. We consider that the editorial lacked balance and there was no declaration of the political interests from either of the authors.

The topic of the article is immaterial but given the backgrounds and affiliations of the authors more information and transparency about the publication process is surely required? We agree that the point of any editorial is to present an opinion, often controversial, to generate discourse and debate. We have no issues with Brexit or Remain issues being debated in *JAN* given the significant impact it has on our profession. We were however, surprised why this research article was accepted for publication as an editorial without undergoing peer-review? According to RW

“Editorials in journals regularly include empirical work at the editors’ discretion”., well that is news to these two authors, with around 100 publications between us we have never submitted an empirical research article as an editorial to any journal, and after speaking to many senior academics in the UK, we are not alone.

We then conducted a very quick and crude scope of the *JAN* archives for the last five years: Volume 75 to 71, which included 54 Issues to the current date (1 June 2019) to determine how many empirical research articles are classified as editorials. The answer is very few that we could find. Indeed, most editorial articles in *JAN* are unsurprisingly editorials in our understanding of the term. Here are a few random examples: 1) Do Chief Nurses need to be academically credible? (Volume 73, Issue 11). 2) Have research assessment exercises improved the quality of nursing research? (Volume 72, Issue 8). Both editorials were no more than two pages long, which was about the average length of most editorials that are generally included in *JAN*. The McCrae and Portes research article was nine pages; the longest so-called editorial we found.

We believe it is disingenuous to publish empirical research as an editorial, as this means no peer review and quality control is at the whim of the Editor in Chief. Given the close relationship (“colleague and friend”) between RW and NM this brings into question the integrity and transparency of the publication process. RW has stated he is “the final arbiter of the content of [@jadvnursing](#)”, but we would draw readers’ attention to the problems of ‘club culture’, as described by Professor Ian Kennedy in the Bristol Inquiry (Dyer 2001).

If *JAN* continue publishing empirical research as editorials that is their prerogative, but the process should be more transparent. One step of ensuring this would be to involve more than one editor in the final decision, especially if a friend, colleague or fellow editor has submitted an article. All authors should publish a conflict or (potential conflict) of interest statement to reveal any important interests and affiliations including if any financial support was procured

in undertaking their work. The history of nursing in the UK is underscored with a series of cabals, hidden networks and vested interests. If we want a candid and modern profession, we need more transparency and openness in all aspects of the profession, including academic publishing.

We are grateful to Professor Roger Watson for giving us the opportunity to write this piece on *JAN* editorial policy.

Potential conflict of Interest:

Dr Andrew Clifton works at De Montfort University as an Associate Professor of Nursing, and is a member of the UK Labour Party. He voted remain in the 2016 referendum.

Dr David Banks works at Queen Margaret University as a Lecturer of Nursing, and was a longstanding member of the UK Labour Party...

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References

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this as: BMJ 2001;323:181