The Red Journal is about to get a new editor-in-chief—just its fourth since it was founded in 1976 and the first woman to take the helm of our society’s premier journal. The term of Anthony Zietman, MD, at the Red Journal has been striking on many levels, but one that is salient has been his faithful promotion of gender equity. As we prepare to welcome Sue Yom, MD, PhD, as our next editor-in-chief, we reflect on the advancements of women in radiation oncology at the Red Journal under the direction of Dr Zietman during his tenure from 2011 to 2021.

When Dr Zietman was appointed as editor-in-chief of the Red Journal, he began with an experienced yet predominantly male group of editors. In 2011, only 15% of members on the editorial and advisory boards were female—considerably lower than the representation of women among Red Journal authors and faculty overall (27% in 2012). Dr Zietman recognized this disparity and pledged to take action. By 2012, he had succeeded in appointing an editorial board consisting of 35% female members, although there continued to be an absence of senior editors who were female. To improve turnover and diversity at the senior level, Dr Zietman implemented term limits on all editorial positions and adopted a merit-based promotion system in which the best reviewers were promoted to associate editor on the basis of objective metrics, and similar metrics were used to promote associates to senior editors. This opened up the ranks to a much larger pool of highly qualified candidates, which happened to include a substantial proportion of female physicians, physicists, and scientists.

Why do diversity, equity, and inclusion matter at a journal? Research demonstrates that the percentages of women who serve as journal editors, first or last authors, authors of editorials, or reviewers are consistently lower than percentages of men, and data are now emerging to confirm underrepresentation of other historically marginalized groups, including racial-ethnic and gender minorities. Involvement in each of these spheres of professional activity has real-world career implications. Within the field of radiation oncology, being appointed to the Red Journal editorial board is a highly notable public mark of distinction and enhances professional reputation, opening the door to...
subsequent opportunities. Furthermore, greater inclusiveness in the composition of an editorial board has numerous important downstream effects. Among these are an impact on the field, insofar as diverse groups tend to ask different questions and are more scientifically rigorous than homogeneous groups, with benefits for the quality of science. Areas that might not otherwise be emphasized come to light when there are contributions of individuals with different perspectives and different life experiences. Greater equity of appointments also appears to lead to a widening of the range of opportunities offered to others. In one study, when women were appointed to an editorial board, they invited women to review 33% of the time; men, in comparison, invited women 27% of the time. A recent study of Red Journal reviewers established that the reviews submitted by women were of equal promptness and quality. Although it is not possible to gauge the accumulated effect of repeated demonstrations that women are adequately equipped to judge merit and value in science, these likely produce subtle continuing effects on women’s ability to lead projects and act in major authorship roles.

There were some real challenges facing the Red Journal when Dr Zietman took over. First and foremost, the journal had thrived under the leadership of the previous editor, James D. Cox, MD, to the point that the journal had accumulated a huge backlog of accepted articles awaiting publication. The first step was to work with the publisher to produce a few “super-sized” issues of the journal to get this backlog of papers published. The second step, to prevent this from happening again, was to become more selective in the articles published, ultimately putting more pressure on the editorial board and peer reviewers to become more selective—and to do all of this faster—making the research more relevant and helping authors of cutting-edge science get their data to the field sooner. This decision was not popular with many people. Established researchers who never had a paper rejected by the Red Journal were suddenly having papers turned away that would have been accepted just a year earlier.

Making the journal more selective was no easy feat. At the time, the journal was receiving about 2000 submissions per year. Dr Cox handled the review of about 1000 of those himself, and the other 1000 were divided among 3 senior editors. Under Dr Zietman, the editorial board was expanded into 9 separate editorial teams: 7 for the various disease sites, 1 for biology, and 1 for physics. These senior editors were experts in the field and would in turn appoint 4 to 7 associate editors.

At many other journals, the editorial board information published on the front pages serves as a list of “who’s who” in their respective fields. An editorial board’s function is often to give a journal legitimacy in a world of many journals, many with remarkably similar names. However, Dr Zietman had a different vision for the Red Journal. All of the editors on his board would be working members and have time-limited terms. Even his own term would be limited, as he recognized turnover to be an essential precondition to diversification of leadership.

Improving turnover at the senior level made the journal a true meritocracy. All new editors came directly from within the ranks of the hundreds of peer reviewers who provide a critical service to the public by scrutinizing papers and reviewing data. As a downstream effect, this simultaneously addressed the problem of women and members of other historically marginalized groups often performing invisible service, by making that service a precondition for recognition.

As Dr Zietman wrote in 2013:

These editorial groups, which make up our editorial board, have been extraordinarily thoughtful and functional, and their members constitute our editorial board. A place on this editorial board is anything but a sinecure. Board members also review the reviewers, grading the quality of their work, and once per year we publish the names of the top reviewers. This recognizes and rewards their efforts, and as the associate editors rotate off the board, we bring in people from this cadre of dedicated reviewers, providing a clear career “conveyor belt” heading upward.

This process allowed female reviewers to demonstrate their ability and interest in the journal with equal opportunity for recognition and advancement. The transparency and criteria-based standards for advancement helped to ensure that leadership was not a privilege only accessible to those with affirming networks but to all who had the talent and drive to contribute. In addition, the hope was that systematically refreshing the board would prevent burn out and allow more members of our specialty the opportunity to serve. This change put each of the editorial groups in charge of 150 to 250 papers per year, a much more manageable number, and allowed each group to focus on the best science in their area of subspecialization.

Fast forward a decade, and the 2021 Red Journal editorial board female representation now includes the deputy editor, 50% of senior editors (6 of 12), 42% of editorial board members (28 of 67), and 27% of other editors (4 of 15), for a total female representation of 41%.

In addition to the promotion of qualified women through the reviewing and editorial chain, in 2011 the Red Journal was the first radiation oncology journal to implement a double-anonymized review process. This was a transition from the previous single-anonymized process in which author names and institutions were provided to the reviewers, which can serve as a biasing factor during review. After adoption of this process there was an increase in mean percentage of female authors on articles at the Red Journal (27.4% [2007-2011] vs 34.0% [2012-2016]; $P = .012$). It was also found that the majority of authors and reviewers favored the double-anonymized review process, with only 6% of authors and 13% of reviewers disagreeing that double-anonymized review should continue at the Red Journal. Indeed, this has allowed our small subspecialty journal to act as a model for other medical journals more generally.
Finally, the Red Journal has served as a prestigious vehicle for the publication of scientific articles and editorials focusing on gender disparities in radiation oncology. After the passing of Eleanor Montague, MD, in 2018, one of the great female historical figures in radiation oncology, Dr Zietman chose to devote a large section of the August 2019 issue to highlighting the place of women in radiation oncology. The issue bore the cover title *Women in Radiation Oncology: Past, Present, and Future*. The theme issue included studies evaluating women’s experiences during residency training and differences in experiences of chairs of academic radiation oncology programs, gender balance among invited speakers at the American Society for Radiation Oncology annual meeting and its association with success, and editorials reflecting on the mechanisms that might hinder the pursuit of equity and interventions that might promote it.

Interviewing deputy editor Dr Yom, faculty member Dr Reshma Jagsi, and then-resident Dr Whitney Beeler, Dr Zietman produced a long-form podcast exploring the issue of gender disparity in radiation oncology across the career phases. This focus was similar to efforts by journals like *The Lancet*, which also launched a theme issue *Advancing Women in Science, Medicine, and Global Health* in 2019.

Reflecting on the work of Dr Anthony Zietman from 2011 to 2021, not only has the Red Journal’s editorial board doubled in size with physicians, physicists, scientists, and statisticians from around the world, but Dr Zietman’s decision to move to a more selective, merit-based system played a critical role in advancing the status of women in radiation oncology. He was a pioneer in opening opportunities to women at every level of the editorial board, even promoting a woman to be his own deputy editor. Elevating women to merited editorial roles, such as those at the Red Journal, is an essential step as we continue to work to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion in radiation oncology. We thank Dr Zietman for his passion, dedication, and tireless work as editor-in-chief of our beloved Red Journal for the last 10 years.

### References