

Commentary: Authorship and Training in Forensic Psychiatry

Joseph D. Bloom, MD

This commentary is written in praise of Dr. Simon's Presidential Address with exemplification of certain of his themes. Forensic fellowships have now become the training ground for the next generation of forensic psychiatrists, who need to be encouraged to find their own best way to write. They should also be encouraged to participate in research with senior mentors and researchers, as published research will lead to the challenging of stereotyping and misinformation about the populations served by forensic psychiatry.

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Robert Simon¹ could have chosen many topics for his Presidential address. He knows many things and he is a prolific writer in the field of forensic psychiatry. The fact that he chose to talk and write about authorship is significant both for him as a person, for us as individuals, and for our organization.

For Simon, writing is a highly personal process that clearly has great rewards and perhaps some personal tortures. He likens authorship to a "lifelong commitment to learning, creativity, and professional growth." This is an unusual statement. By linking authorship to lifelong learning in medicine, Simon associates writing with a spirit of inquisitiveness and questioning that is the basis of a rich professional life. It may not be enough just to read. Writing demands a commitment to go further, to question more, to know more about something, to investigate further, and finally to commit it all to paper. It doesn't matter where you practice, as there are questions everywhere. I spent eight years early in my career in private practice, and I made an agreement with myself that I would write one paper each year and that the paper would be about something that was right in front of me. I did that, and it provided me with a platform for the rest of my career.

In allowing us to view his approach to the creative process, Simon provides us with important insights and helpful tips about how to write. Coming from

someone so experienced, these words can only help younger colleagues find their way to putting something on paper. Whether we write, as Simon does, on a schedule in a quiet place or sitting at a computer with Bruce Springsteen's music blaring in the background, we all must find our way to getting something written. One of our distinguished past presidents can write only if he sits in a quiet place with his three sharpened pencils placed beside a clean piece of paper, while another writes anywhere and everywhere using his trusted laptop. The point for the younger colleagues among us is to find their best way. Simon's talk is giving us all permission to find our own way to write, but he is giving us little choice about whether we should or shouldn't write.

In addition to exploring the personal problems involved in writing, Simon's lecture can also be applied to our organization, the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law (AAPL). AAPL is young. We know the founders. Some were at our last Annual Meeting and heard Simon's presentation, and most of the second-generation leaders were also in the audience. We have come far as an organization in a relatively short time: more members, board certification, significant influence in the American Psychiatric Association, an excellent journal and annual meetings, and significant contributions to the scientific literature and to public policy in the field of forensic psychiatry.

If we see Simon's focus on authorship as a general summons to lifelong intellectual curiosity and learning, then the question of the scientific literature and

Dr. Bloom is Dean Emeritus, School of Medicine, and Professor Emeritus, Department of Psychiatry, Oregon Health and Science University, Portland, OR. Address correspondence to: Joseph D. Bloom, MD, 3181 SW Sam Jackson Park Rd., Portland, OR 97201. E-mail: bloomj@ohsu.edu

its influence on public policy is an aspect of his thoughts that should be emphasized especially for AAPL's younger members. We are, after all, primarily a group of physicians and we believe in the scientific method and in the application of that method to the advancement of science. We believe in the biopsychosocial model, and we believe that each aspect of that model derives from a science, whether it be genetics, sociology, or anthropology. We believe in both basic and applied research, which in the forensic field might be termed forensic mental health services research. This is all by way of saying that one of the most important and perhaps enjoyable introductions to writing for younger colleagues comes from the participation in empirical research with senior mentors and researchers. So, although Simon alluded to this aspect of writing in his talk, I write this commentary to emphasize that research collaborations represent a royal route to authorship, lifelong exploration, and, most important, potential advances in public policy.

Our patients are among the most maligned of individuals, whether they face a criminal charge, a conviction and a prison sentence, or a successful insanity

defense with years of hospitalization and little likelihood of community release. In these settings, the settings in which many of us work, empirical research that leads to authorship and to the potential challenging of stereotypes and misinformation is crucial.

Fellowships in medicine were once viewed as the province of academia, and specially trained fellows were to become the teachers and researchers for the next generation. We all know that this is a dated concept and that fellowships have now become, in essence, the training ground for the next generation of very specialized practitioners. We can insist that our fellowships teach and require authorship beyond the written forensic report, that the fellowships themselves will have active research programs, and that the fellows will participate in these research programs and learn how to design research and to write up the results. I believe this is the ultimate message of Simon's focus on authorship. It is a broad call to action to which I hope that we will respond.

Reference

1. Simon RI: Authorship in forensic psychiatry: a perspective. *J Am Acad Psychiatry Law* 35:18–26, 2007