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September 22, 2005

Re: Psychosocial stress, physiological indicators of stress, and health in women leaving TANF (#2005-115)

Dear Dr. Dougherty,

I am writing to share some of my concerns regarding the review process for the above manuscript submitted to *Nursing Research* in June, 2005. I am doing so operating under the belief that the peer review process is the best process available to ensure academic and scholarly standards are met. Having said that, I accept the decision by *Nursing Research* to reject the above manuscript without any further consideration for publication. As a regular reviewer for *Nursing Research*, however, I am a bit perplexed by the arrival of that decision, given the character of the review comments.

Were you to review the comments, it is evident that Reviewer #1's critiques revolved around editorial type issues, or the way in which results were presented, as opposed to substantive concerns. Reviewer #2 did have substantive concerns regarding the interpretation of findings being presented in a biased way, and the possibility that there were several contextual factors in the sample of women's lives that would be important to include in the regression models. Otherwise, comments of Reviewer #2 revolved around clarifying some issues in the manuscript (e.g., Cronbach alpha reporting for instruments used, providing standard/acceptable CV% values for salivary cortisol, etc.). Both reviewers cited the importance of the topic of the manuscript, and Reviewer #1 had additional positive comments.

Although there are no clear guidelines from *Nursing Research* about the nature or type of manuscript shortcomings that constitute an absolute 'rejection' versus those that constitute a recommendation to 'revise and resubmit', as a reviewer, I hold the fundamental tenet that unless there are fatal flaws in a manuscript, my recommendation is to revise and resubmit. 'Fatal flaws' include problems that cannot be clarified or rectified – for example, instruments used in the research that were not psychometrically sound, data collection procedures that place the internal validity of a study in serious question, or the presentation of ideas that are logically incompatible, without sufficient rationale or explanation. As I consider the comments of both reviewers, none point to any flaws in the manuscript that could be considered 'fatal', at least in

my estimation. All could be clarified / remedied / responded to, with the study integrity remaining intact.

Thus, while I know you are very busy with the editorial responsibilities of the journal, I did feel compelled to bring my concerns to your attention. I know that you strive for excellence in *Nursing Research*, and we all appreciate your dedication to nursing science and scholarship. I believe that while peer review is the fundamental element toward this effort that needs to be sustained, I also believe at times the processes by which we conduct peer review should be reflected on. Please let me know if the 'fatal flaw' tenet I hold as a reviewer is one that is too lenient or not consistent with the goals of *Nursing Research*, as that feedback is important for the aims of the journal and also for my professional development as a nurse academician.

Sincerely,

Shawn M. Kneipp, ARNP, PhD
Associate Professor