

## Editorial

# Editor's report and reflections 2006–2007

Ten years ago, when I was first invited to help edit the *EJSO*, it was a small regional subspecialty journal with a limited subscription circulation, a low impact factor, minimal projection outside Europe and a succession of publishing companies. Irving Taylor's editorship laid the foundations for our present success, such that since 2003 has advanced in leaps and bounds. In 2003, our manuscript flow was around 300 per year, our impact factor was around 1.0 and we were publishing eight issues annually. We were taking our first tentative steps onto the Internet and had just started our partnership with Elsevier, our present publishers.

In 2006, our manuscript flow had increased to some 600 per annum, our publication frequency to 10 issues per annum, our impact factor to over 2.0, and our readership of downloaded articles off the worldwide web to some 130,000 copies. In the first quarter alone of 2007, 250 manuscripts of steadily and visibly improving quality were submitted. Any complacency that we may have felt about a steady state of manuscript flow has been dispelled. Manuscripts pour in from around the world, and we have developed a very wide international specialist reviewer base using the sophisticated search tools at our disposal.

To edit the journal at present is to ride a tiger of runaway success, or perhaps just to cling onto his tail as he careers onwards. Your Editorial Board is in continual discussion about how best to manage this expansion.

We can attribute the success to a number of factors. The first has been our stable partnership with the team at Elsevier, which has brought us the resources and management support and expertise of a major publisher, and critically a worldwide presence on the ScienceDirect Internet portal.

The second has been the setting of a strategy to lift us out of a regional subspecialty mindset into a broad multidisciplinary specialty journal with worldwide projection. One symbol of this change has been the simplification of our title and citation name to the *EJSO* and the adoption of the by-line, *The Journal of Cancer Surgery*.

The third has been the generous "hands off" support of our successive chairmen, Professors Joop van Dongen and Niall O'Higgins, and of all the editorial and specialty board members, for a programme of modernisation and experimentation. This has reinforced the advantages of a small

and focused editorial team, short lines of communication, and rapid acceptance of the benefits of major change within the organisation.

A most important factor in our success has been our relentless drive for the quality, clarity and succinct focus of scientific writing, to condense the mass of raw ore that we receive into nuggets of iron. This strategy is intended to set us apart from other journals and has come to be appreciated by our readers, reviewers and authors alike. Only by this means will we be taken seriously as a worldwide journal of reference and drive our impact factor upwards in the longer term. To this end, we have set out precise stylistic guidelines for concise, focussed writing on the website to which all authors are expected to adhere, and these guidelines are rigorously and robustly applied. This can mean a cycle of several revisions and clarifications for any one manuscript, but we believe that the end result of an interesting, readable journal justifies the cooperation of the authors and the considerable editorial effort involved. This year, we will further refine this strategy by limiting all manuscripts to a maximum of 3000 words and five figures and tables, to create additional space for the many deserving papers which achieve publication standard.

Editors and their publishers must also think strategically in a rapidly changing technical and intellectual environment. The Internet has created enormous opportunities for a journal such as the *EJSO*, of which we have been quick to avail ourselves, but it also creates new challenges and threats. There is a school of thought which says that all journal publishing should and will go entirely online. While this may eventually become true, we continue to hold the view that the production of a printed journal imposes intellectual disciplines through the review and quality assurance process. This is not always assured online. For the foreseeable future, we will continue to produce a tangible, quality, readable and archivable product which we believe is appreciated by our subscribers.

A further challenge for the editor of every specialist journal is the Impact Factor. This is a very imperfect and weighted measure of success, which will always favour the large, long established, broadly based multidisciplinary journals over those such as our own. We are well aware that many authors, including members of our own editorial team

and board, feel under considerable pressure from their own institutions to publish in “high Impact Factor” journals and submit elsewhere papers which we would like to publish ourselves. It would be possible to develop a highly selective strategy which focussed purely on ratings, but that would produce a journal of less general interest, which in turn would be a disservice to our subscribers and general readers.

Journal Editors also have a Hippocratic duty to protect and sustain the quality of the world’s scientific literature, but they lack the tools to enforce it. Publication fraud varies from the merely irritating, such as near duplicate publication, salami slicing and statistical fishing expeditions on material to find spurious correlations, to the wilfully dishonest. Each year, new examples on human ingenuity and dishonesty within your profession come to our attention, such as in the stealing, recycling and relabelling of previously published material, even entire papers. Our review systems, including Scopus, which all reviewers are encouraged to use on every manuscript, continually turn up examples of fraud. The most effective defence is the alertness and astuteness of our readers and reviewers, aided by a fair degree of luck. For example, in one case this year, a specialist subject reviewer recognised word for word in a paper sent to him his own paper of five years previously, and his complaint was justified. Where such fraud is discovered, we take measured steps to challenge the

perpetrators and notify the Committee On Publication Ethics (COPE), but our sanctions are limited and there is a need for a robust international database and strategy to deal with the problem. We do not know how many deviant papers slip through the net.

Underpinning all of this strategy is a conviction that we have a profound professional duty to ourselves and to those who are dependent upon us to protect language and the precise meanings and deployment of words. Otherwise, we devalue the clarity of thought which protects our intellectual freedom and the progress of medicine and of mankind in general. We enter an Orwellian world where words mean whatever our leaders chose them to mean, with predictably damaging consequences. Each deviation from clarity and precision of thought and presentation in the papers which we publish weakens us all just that little bit more.

The *EJSO* is supported by a lean and hardworking production team and technical support staff at Elsevier, to whom the Editorial Board extends its thanks, just as we thank all the authors, reviewers and readers who contribute to making the *EJSO* the success that it is.

D. Rew

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