

GUEST EDITORIAL

Reminiscences of a former editor

Professor David Ames, the editor-in-chief of *International Psychogeriatrics*, has kindly asked some of us who edited the journal at one time or another to write a personal piece. I was asked because I edited the journal longer than anyone else – from 1996 to 2003. I decided in 2003 that I would give up my editorship and my National Health Service (U.K.) consultant's post. It also coincided with my 65th birthday, which was declared by von Bismarck, the nineteenth-century Chancellor of Germany, to be the age of retirement when a pension would be received. The decision was not meant by me to be taken too seriously but it was convenient. My record will not last of course, since David Ames will have completed two terms, which will finish in 2011. The job is like that of the U.S. President, namely, two terms only!

There is no special definition of an editor. There are so many types of journals. But the job is for someone who is prepared to be the "servant" of the organization. Thus, at my university, Edinburgh, the chief administrative officer is called the Secretary. The same applies to some government ministers in the U.K. and U.S.A., and perhaps elsewhere. While important, the editor's job is actually a humble one. Major decisions are made or confirmed by the board of directors after all. Having said that, the job is unique. It might be said that the journal is the intellectual arm of the International Psychogeriatric Association, with the mandate to encourage the publication of the best research findings in the field. The editor must create a network or culture of authors and reviewers that will enable this to happen. When I was editor I was astounded by how many people were prepared to cooperate fully in such a venture. I was especially impressed by how the best of us would take time out to help. The principle, of course, is like asking a busy person to do something, e.g. to review a paper. So the editor is the captain of the ship, with final say, but is answerable to the crew on board. Failure means being fired. This has happened several times recently in North America. But it keeps one on one's toes! Nevertheless, several IPA members, from several different countries (e.g. U.S.A., Germany, Canada, U.K., Australia and Japan), have been prepared to face this challenge.

I was asked by Professor Sandy Finkel to be the editor at the Sydney IPA seventh congress in 1995. I initially turned down the offer since I had just moved

from Toronto to St. Louis to work at the University Medical School there. On consideration and after gentle persuasion by that good man Sandy, I took the job, since while I had been a medical scientist, clinician and teacher for 25 years, I had never been an editor. It was in effect a glorious challenge. I had a pleasant office at the medical school and a bright and thoughtful Texan secretary, Nancy Raley. The journal prior to that time had come out twice a year and had a yellow cover. As it happens I find the color yellow an abomination. I was happy to get rid of it. We trawled the library for the colors of other successful journals and discovered that white and blue were the most popular. Blue has always been my favorite so, why not go with the flow?

The current journal's cover and contents have been changed yet again, which is as it should be. This seems to be a characteristic of most journals and even newspapers. It is for the editor and board of directors to plant their imprimatur on the journal.

So I, a British-Canadian, took up my post in 1996 and forsook it in 2003. Although I was based in a midwest American university in St. Louis, the managing editor was in Chicago and the publisher in New York, we did manage to get together from time to time and things were mostly transparent and straightforward. Editors actually tend to learn their trade on the job. As the editor-in-chief I only had two simple maxims: first, the editor always takes final responsibility, and second, the editor can only do this by standing behind his journal referees. To some extent the editor can shape content by writing editorials, having supplements and requesting papers. In a journal like *International Psychogeriatrics*, and there are quite a few others in the same clinical/research area, we endeavor to be at the cutting edge but recognize that the "eureka phenomenon" is unlikely. Such papers will go to the *The Lancet*, *New England Journal of Medicine*, *Nature* or *Science*. For example, Crick and Watson put their discovery of DNA paper into *Nature*. Any article of that kind should be succinct and a revelation.

Dealing with specific issues I only had one real beef about the journal and that was the name. I did not like the term "psychogeriatric". I thought it old fashioned and false. Discussing it gets us into the awkward area of "mind" and "body" discussions which are fruitless, but the title has been around for a long time and we are probably stuck with it. The American term "geriatric psychiatry" is much better.

In managing the journal from our St. Louis University Medical School office, Nancy Raley and I had the backing of George Grossberg, the departmental chairman, the university library and the university art and design department. We got to know who all the players were across the world in our field when it came to publishing original papers and doing reviews. Very quickly we were aware that a network had been built up. We were on good terms with Chicago (Fern Finkel, our managing director) and New York (Rosemary Piscatelli, our editor at the publishers). The publishers in fact helped look after the Journal from 1989 to 2003. This is described by David Ames in an editorial entitled "Farewell to Springer Publishing" (2003). During our period of office the Journal became fully indexed in abstracting services; a medical student and I carried out a study of the impact factor for the journal, which proved to be 1.118 in 2002; we published articles from a variety of countries; we published invited editorials; and we published poetry and so on. Suffice to say that much of this is covered by David Ames in his editorial "Plus ça change" (2003).

These were, of course, interesting and challenging times. I discovered that some authors targeted the journal. They submitted repeatedly, with not particularly interesting papers. This is not uncommon in journal publishing. A research group focuses its findings and builds up stature by attaching itself to a journal. This is embarrassing to the editor and has to be stopped. Another problem is dealing with grandees. Thus a famous investigator was invited to write an editorial whereupon he sent a sixteen page co-authored review paper. This was unacceptable, but rather than get into a confrontation with such a major figure in our field I quickly got back to him and said how pleased I was to accept his scientific paper! It should be noted that diplomacy is high up on the list of an editor's necessary qualities.

In 2000 I decided to return to the U.K., my native land. Eventually I settled in the city of Cambridge with my friends Peter and Judith, and I negotiated with Chicago to relocate the journal to Cambridge, U.K. The IPA was amenable to this venture. It seemed to start a trend as David Ames, when he took up the post, later took the journal to Melbourne. Since Nancy Raley could not do the assistant job from that distance, I sought local help. My friend Judith Sylph fitted the bill. Whereas Nancy Raley was the superb administrator, Judith was the superb scholar (she had after all a degree in English from the University of Oxford). Both my assistants/friends/colleagues did a splendid job in their different ways. I should say that I remain in touch with them both.

Things continued well until I retired on 3 January 2003. *Inter alia* I had thought about a successor for some time beforehand. I asked two eminent U.K. IPA members if they were interested, but they declined. Some U.K. doctors tended to see the journal as a U.S. publication with its office in Chicago and were more inclined to go to their local journals. Fortunately the figure of David Ames appeared more and more on the radar and he became the assistant editor and then the editor-in-chief on my departure.

David has an excellent record in all aspects and comes from that stable of Australian geriatric psychiatrists which has been so productive. The Aussies appear to be comfortable in both the British and American views of the world. Suffice to say that under David the journal has continued to go up like a projectile.

One of the strengths of academia in Cambridge is the presence of Cambridge University Press. This is a vibrant business enterprise embedded in academia. During 2002 or so, it became evident that we should move on from Springer Publishing in New York, despite having to give up the splendid Rosemary Piscatelli.

Judith and I visited Cambridge University Press for an initial chat, with of course, the support of Chicago. Then David joined us and we had English tea in the Orchard Tea Rooms at Granchester, just outside Cambridge, where Bertrand Russell, Virginia Woolf, Maynard Keynes and other worthies used to go once upon a time. It made us feel that we were kissing the hem and we agreed on David's succession and the move to Cambridge University Press (should they have the best tender, which they did). So that was almost the end.

When I left my clinical job I wrote to the chief executive to confirm my departure, much against his wishes, and declared, quoting the eighteenth-century poet James Thomson, that in retirement I would be having: "An elegant sufficiency, content, retirement, rural quiet, friendship and books". Has that been achieved? Absolutely. Is it as good as editing the journal? Slightly better!

There is always nostalgia about being an editor. Having a professorship with tenure; having an honorary qualification; working with the World Psychiatric Association and so on, are brilliant; but an editorship feels unique at the time. So *Vale*. Well not quite *Vale*. Once an editor, then always an editor perhaps. I still keep my eye out for interesting pieces and comments. First, *International Psychiatry* recently featured a guest editorial by Peter Tyrer (2008) on "The Editor's dilemma: assessing papers from low-income countries". This discussed seven strategies to help resolve this dilemma. Very pertinent to our own international journal. Second,

the *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* ran a research piece on “What errors do peer reviewers detect, and does training improve their ability to detect them?” (Schroter *et al.*, 2008). They miss errors; and training does not help!

Finally, I saw a piece this autumn, but did not keep the reference, which stated that articles tended to be refuted, on average, over the subsequent four years. This is good for scientific rigor but may dismay editors who hope for something substantial in their journal!

Final *Vale*: I still have some lovely tributes sent to me at the time of my retirement. Thank you again to all my erstwhile friends and colleagues who gave unstinting help and support during the period of my editorship.

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