

## Editorial

The origin of peer review is closely tied to the development of scientific institutions and journals. When the Royal Society of London began publishing its *Philosophical Transactions* in 1665, manuscript review was solely the responsibility of the editor, who might, on occasion, enlist the help of others to provide an opinion. However, by 1752 a review policy was introduced whereby each manuscript was sent to a small group of experts in the field. This process spread sporadically, and had become the standard for scientific appraisal by the mid-twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> Some have linked the spread of peer review to the advent of new technology which facilitates the replication and distribution of manuscripts to reviewers. Whether this is true or not, both *Science* and the *Journal of the American Medical Association* implemented peer review practices in the 1940s, and other scientific journals rapidly followed suit.

To the majority of us in medicine now, such a system seems sacrosanct for we regard it as a validation of our efforts to have papers published in a peer-reviewed journal. However the system has its detractors. Writing in *Times Higher Education* in July this year, Richard Bateman, of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, argued that the editorial process sacrifices innovation and creativity.<sup>2</sup> He wrote: ‘...Exciting and provocative science is most likely to be found in outlets that require little peer review or editorial intervention’, and went on to suggest that ‘...the increasingly electronic nature of publishing and the subsequent filtering of scientific outputs through search engines does raise a more fundamental question: is there an ongoing need for peer review, or indeed for the present level of ‘editorial intervention’?’.

We will continue to adhere to peer review – and editorial intervention – for the unprejudiced reading of a manuscript by a colleague and the hope of constructive criticism seems empirically correct. Indeed, we value this and would wish to go on record in thanking all of our Assistant Editors, especially Liam Flood who shoulders so much of the reviewing work, for all of their industry during the last year. Peer review has additional benefits. When reviewing an article, Samuel Johnson is reputed to have written ‘Your manuscript is both good and original, but the part that is good is not original and the part that is original is not good’. Almost certainly this is incorrectly attributed, but the quote itself is worthwhile for it serves to remind us that peer review may also root out plagiarism and duplicate publication.

In other areas we are more enthusiastic about advancing. The advent of widespread electronic publication may threaten the editorial process, but open

access publishing, in which material is freely available electronically to end-users, is also serving to change the *status quo ante*. Such a process may sound attractive, but free access commonly exacts a financial toll on the author – at the present time, approximately half of all open access publications have author fees to cover the costs of publication, as an alternative to readership subscription fees.<sup>3</sup> We at *The Journal of Laryngology & Otology* have no immediate plans to charge authors for publication. However during 2009 we have been in discussion with our publishers to trial free electronic access on a limited basis to readers in developing countries. We therefore hope, by the beginning of next year, that the *Journal* will be available on a free, electronic basis to the Indian sub-continent during 2010. If this is a success then it may be continued and expanded to other areas of the world – provided that advertising and institutional fees will cover the costs of publication. In addition we have been discussing new cover and page layouts as well as moving the *Journal* to full colour printing. We hope to be able to make announcements on these matters in the very near future.

We continue to receive a good number of manuscripts from around the world, and the previous increase in numbers from the Far East, Australasia and the United States has been maintained. In 2009, we received 755 papers and published 189 Main Articles (including reviews and historical articles) and 101 Clinical Records (including short communications). Thus, the number of papers available for each paper edition has continued to enable each issue to contain a balanced supply of articles from each sub-speciality, and, by dint of expanding the volume size on occasions, the time between acceptance and publication has been reduced.

Our success in attracting material appears to be reflected in our impact factor. The journal impact factor system has its detractors and is clearly imperfect – but we all still adhere to it! It is gratifying to note that the *Journal's* impact factor has risen from 0.528 in 2003 to 0.796 in 2008. Throughout most of the earlier part of the last decade, the impact factor had been steady at around 0.5; its subsequent rise mirrors what we perceive to be an increase in the quality of submitted material. It also clearly reflects the hard work of all the members of the editorial and production teams, as well as the ongoing success of the website submission system. Our impact fact does remain behind that of *Laryngoscope* (1.877), *Clinical Otolaryngology* (1.614) and *Annals of Otology, Rhinology and Laryngology* (1.339), the closest related journals achieving higher scores, but

it is to be hoped that we can close the gap on them in the foreseeable future.

The JLO/RSM Visiting Professors for 2008–2009 were Professor David Kennedy and Professor Erwin Officiers, who travelled through Britain and Eire with the Presidents of the Section of Otology, Iain Swan, and of Rhinology and Laryngology, Professor Janet Wilson. This remains a successful venture for the *Journal*, and videos of the presentations given have been added to the *Journal* website for viewing.

The website itself has settled into a regular pattern of working, with few changes in the last year. The digital archive has now been available for two years, and the content management system has allowed rapid updating of the home page in advance of paper publication. Links to the Cambridge University Press site now allow seamless transition to the *Journal* archive and to video content, and the author tracking system has also now been incorporated as an integral part of the site. We are sorry to be losing the services of Nitesh Patel as web editor at the end of the year, and would like to record our thanks to him for all his efforts on our behalf during the last four years. We hope to appoint a successor early in 2010 and to further develop the site during the next year in conjunction with our commercial partner, Tell, to whom we also owe thanks for their ongoing support during 2009.

We were sorry to lose the services of Sarah Sharpe from the marketing Department at Cambridge University Press during 2009 but are pleased to

welcome Jacqui Clark, who previously worked as a publishing assistant in the CUP English Language Teaching Department. We also wish, of course, to record our thanks to all of our production team in Cambridge and in particular to Sue Perkins and Dan Edwards, who have worked so hard on our behalf. But, needless to say, our biggest thanks must go to the sterling work of Rosamund Greensted and Iona Copley, Production Editors who have laboured incessantly and cheerfully to cajole us to better things and to keep us focussed. As senior editors, we are only too aware of their contribution. We all owe them a big debt of gratitude.

Finally, we do of course look forward to receiving your contributions in 2010 and also your comments – whether they be positive or negative – and we wish you a pleasant and enjoyable festive season and best wishes for the New Year.

#### References

- 1 Spier RE. Peer review and innovation. *Science and Engineering Ethics* 2002;**1**:99–108
- 2 Bateman R. Pursuit of knowledge is being hamstrung by heavy-handed editing. *Times Higher Education* 20 July 2009; <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?sectioncode=26&storycode=407381>
- 3 Open Access Overview 2007. In: <http://www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/overview.htm> [19 June 2007]

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