Editorial: A new Editor-in-Chief and the 40th anniversary of the Journal of Antimicrobial Chemotherapy

J. Peter Donnelly

Department of Haematology, Radboud University Medical Centre, Nijmegen, Geert Grooteplein 8, Postbus 9101, 6500 HB, The Netherlands

E-mail: p.donnelly@usa.net

The Journal of Antimicrobial Chemotherapy celebrates its 40th anniversary in 2015. I am delighted to be taking over the helm as Editor-in-Chief from Professor Alan Johnson. I am honored to be the eighth Editor-in-Chief of what has become known affectionately as the ‘blue Journal’. Those of you who are old enough to remember the original Journal will have seen many changes in the last 40 years. In 1975 there were around 100 articles published. This has now risen to around 500 articles annually. The success of the Journal is reflected in the impact factor, which now exceeds 5. The Journal received almost 2000 papers for consideration last year, but we had to disappoint authors by rejecting more than three-quarters of submissions.

For the first two decades typewritten articles were sent by post to the Editor-in-Chief who then selected reviewers who received their copy also by post accompanied by a sheet of editorial symbols. The review was then conducted with a pen or pencil. The reviewer then typed out his or her review and returned it by post to the Editor-in-Chief. Revisions were also done using typewriters, brown envelopes and the Postal Service. The introduction of the Internet changed all that and we now have ScholarOne™ Manuscripts as a portal for all communications between authors, editors and reviewers. This has helped reduce the time from submission to publication by nearly two-thirds over the last 15 years. We can now boast a median time from acceptance to online publication of just over 4 weeks.

The Journal has also changed in size from a relatively small version to US Letter dimensions and its weight has also doubled from around 400 g per issue to 750 g per issue. The third decade saw introduction of online articles and the generation of a complete digital archive from the very first edition onwards. The Journal has also had three different publishers, the current one being Oxford University Press, and is now part of a so-called stable of journals that includes Clinical Infectious Diseases, Journal of Infectious Diseases and Medical Mycology. This gives it high visibility alongside its sister journals.

Now entering its fifth decade, the Journal has never been in a stronger position. This is due to the combined efforts of a strong Editorial Board with a range of specialist expertise in all areas of antimicrobial chemotherapy, a dedicated Editorial Office staff, a strong liaison with Oxford University Press and last, but certainly not least, the army of busy professional people who volunteer their time to act as peer reviewers for the Journal. To cope with increasing demand, the Journal restructured its Editorial Board to comprise a team of six Senior Editors who can call upon a group of around 40 Editors to handle submissions. This has largely been very successful and will be continued for the foreseeable future. However, even this sizeable team has occasionally felt quite overwhelmed by the sheer volume of submissions. Consequently, we are looking for ways to rapidly and fairly select those articles that, for a variety of reasons, are unlikely to have a sufficiently high priority for publication. Hence, at the current rate of submissions, two or three of every five articles received will be turned away at the door, so to speak, without ever going to review. Whilst we appreciate that the authors of these articles will be disappointed, we feel it is better to tell them quickly that we cannot offer their manuscript a place in the Journal.

Other challenges that lie ahead include the form in which articles are made available. Currently we offer a print version alongside an online version. As with all social developments we have noticed an explosion in the online access to the Journal and a slow decline in the number of people wishing to have the print version. The Journal will be examining this trend closely to meet the changing demands and wishes of its readers. There is also the matter of who pays for publication. At the moment authors can pay for free immediate online access (open access), but it is optional. It seems likely that this will change in the next few years and that the so-called ‘author pays’ model may become the norm.

Any changes in the Journal will be carefully considered in the light of whether they meet the Journal’s scope and aims, and the wishes of its readers and authors. Together, the Journal and the BSAC will continue to serve the common interests of members, authors and readers to meet the challenges ahead.

On behalf of the Journal, I thank Alan Johnson for his hard work and achievements as Editor-in-Chief and look forward to his continued support, albeit in a less intensive form. As the new kid on the block, I aim to build on Alan’s successes and help steer the Journal through the next 5 years.

Transparency declarations

None to declare.

© The Author 2014. Published by Oxford University Press on behalf of the British Society for Antimicrobial Chemotherapy. All rights reserved. For Permissions, please e-mail: journals.permissions@oup.com