EDITORIAL

New Developments at the Annals of Occupational Hygiene

Several new developments at the Annals of Occupational Hygiene (AOH) over the past year may be of interest to the readership. First, welcome to Ms Sarah Pyle as our new Editorial Manager. Sarah comes to the British Occupational Hygiene Society (BOHS) and AOH with experience working with an academic publisher in the past, and more recently with training in the law. Sarah takes over from Ms Roz Phillips, who will be working on the development of the Occupational Hygiene Training Association (OHTA) as part of services provided by BOHS. Many thanks to Roz for her work over the past 2 years working with me on establishing new methods and procedures for managing the AOH workflow and liaising with the many authors, editors, and reviewers involved in making the Annals the respected journal that it is. OHTA and BOHS are lucky to have Roz dedicating her numerous talents to expanding the scope, reach, and effectiveness of this model of global occupational hygiene training (Alesbury and Bailey, 2014).

In addition, we successfully recruited Dr Svend Erik Mathiassen as a new Assistant Editor. Dr Mathiassen is Professor and Director of the Centre for Musculoskeletal Research in the Department of Occupational and Public Health Sciences at the University of Gävle, Sweden. He fills a key niche for the Annals with his expertise in ergonomics and musculoskeletal problems in the workplace, a vital and potentially growing area of attention in occupational hygiene. Dr Mathiassen also brings to the board an important perspective on occupational exposure assessment in general. His work largely focuses on the statistical validity and efficiency of exposure assessment strategies. His recent contributions have begun to elucidate the costs and benefits of alternative designs (Mathiassen et al., 2014) — areas that are equally significant for traditional airborne occupational exposures as they are for physical hazards.

Responding to the need for additional accountability and transparency for potential conflicts of interest and proper assignment of authorship for the journal, we also instituted a new policy for incoming manuscripts. Since May, we have required the corresponding authors for submitted papers to fill out a form specifying their sources of support, and identifying any direct or indirect conflicts of interest following the general guidelines of the Committee on Publication Ethics (http://publicationethics.org/). The form further asks for the contributions of each author to the submitted paper, to ensure compliance with the authorship guidelines, which we have spelled out (Ogden, 2007).

Although the form can be confusing for some authors, it has enabled us on numerous occasions to obtain a fuller understanding of the paper’s provenance, and to ensure that the acknowledgements and declaration of interests included in the paper are clear and complete. In discussion with other journal editors and our publishers at Oxford University Press, we believe we’re on the right track with this procedure. We plan to clarify the information requested and update this form soon, to assist authors providing the information needed to ensure the readers are fully informed.

Finally, at the beginning of last spring, we announced the availability of a new category of
submission—short communications. The instructions for authors describe these as follows:

Short communications are descriptive studies, with limited data, that present new information of importance to the readership, but with insufficient data for a full original research report. Examples include: a description of an occupational disease case with a thorough investigation of the exposures likely to have given rise to the disease; a demonstration of a new measurement principle or device with potential for solving an important exposure measurement problem; evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of a novel exposure control strategy. In each case, the data available are insufficient to support a full original research paper or prove the validity of the observation, but provide potentially important information to occupational hygienists. Short communications will generally be less than 1500 words and have up to two tables or figures. Such reports will be peer reviewed through our normal process.

When we began this initiative, we thought it could encourage the publication of limited studies that may not fulfill the scientific expectations of an original contribution, but could make an important positive impact on occupational health. We were aware of many limited investigations or field studies that could contribute to our science, and especially to our practice-based community, but were not published because of their limited scope. However, we were also concerned about some potential downsides of publishing these studies; the potential of publication of less rigorous science, and the degradation of the reputation and impact of the journal.

To date (beginning of November), we have had 10 short communications submissions. Of these, four have been accepted, three are still under review or revision, and three were rejected. Of the four accepted, two are exposure assessment studies: one of these explores a novel technologies’ application for whole-body vibration assessment (Wolfgang et al., 2014), and the other assesses wood dust exposure among small businesses in a developing country (Ayalew et al., 2014). The other two accepted papers characterize exposure controls—one looking at the use of ventilation in confined space welding (Pouzou et al., 2014), and the other evaluating control applications for silica dust during stone cutting operations in an experimental setting (Cooper et al., 2014). Both of the latter papers had been originally submitted as a full paper, but upon recommendation of the editor, resubmitted successfully as a short communication. Although neither paper was sufficient in scope for a full research paper, they both contribute to our understanding of exposure control strategies and are therefore of value to the hygiene community. In my assessment, our record thus far would suggest that short communications answer a need from both authors and readers for publication of findings of limited scope, without substantially undermining the scientific contributions of the journal.

Noah S. Seixas

REFERENCES


