of Europe and preferably comprise an equal number of scientists and clinicians. To this day, the balance of science and clinical medicine within ESHRE’s administration and activities is no better reflected than in the requirement that the chairmanship alternates from term to term between a scientist and a clinician.

Bob, however, did not just provide ESHRE with its constitution and motivation; he also, in characteristically ‘visionary’ style, positioned ESHRE as a reference point in the ethical debates which the progress of reproductive medicine would inevitably inspire. Indeed, the first subcommittee he had formed in ESHRE was on the ethical and legal aspects of assisted reproduction (with Jean Cohen as Chairman). His first issue as editor of Human Reproduction had also contained a paper by an academic Anglican theologian on the ethics of IVF, and the main scientific sessions of both the first and the second annual meetings (in Bonn and Brussels) had each included sessions on ethics and law.

Bob, of course, had first-hand experience of the public (and professional) anxieties about the ethics of IVF. Even the Nobel Assembly’s announcement in October noted that his research ahead of the birth of Louise Brown ‘became the topic of a lively ethical debate that was initiated by Edwards himself. Several religious leaders, ethicists, and scientists demanded that the project be stopped, while others gave it their support.’ These were the real battles which Edwards and Steptoe had had to fight: accusations that their work was ‘unethical’, grant refusals on the grounds of immorality. Howard and Georgeanna Jones in Norfolk, USA, had been similarly delayed in their work by public protests and controversy. And for many others of those ESHRE pioneers consensus on the ethics of assisted reproduction was an important reason for their involvement. Indeed, the public position of ESHRE would provide a formative layer in the subsequent development of several countries’ legislations, including Norway, where Europe’s first laws in IVF were introduced in 1987. Similarly, Paul Devroey, Chairman of ESHRE from 2005 to 2007, has named ESHRE’s statements in ethics and law as landmarks in the society’s history, and as necessary today—when moral views on reproduction have been written into the politics of so many countries—as in 1984, when Bob formed that first ethics subcommittee.

Bob Edwards as a Chairman and past-Chairman of ESHRE was as sympathetic and encouraging as he would also be in the editor’s chair of Human Reproduction. And it seems fair to say that it was his charismatic geniality, as much as his scientific foresight, which inspired the growth of ESHRE and its journal. For just as so many of our great pioneers in IVF passed through the training grounds of Bourn Hall, so many were also attracted to the magnetism of Edwards as the inspiration of ESHRE. It was here and in the journal that Bob found, as the Nobel Assembly noted, an environment in Europe to share his work and encourage research in others.

Between then and Bob’s resignation from the editorship of Human Reproduction in 2000 he had a part to play in most of ESHRE’s milestone developments. As a former Chairman, he supported the concept of data collection, first from the burgeoning application of ICSI in the early 1990s, and later for monitoring IVF in Europe. This year in Rome, as further testimony to this ‘father of IVF’, ESHRE’s IVF monitoring consortium reported that ‘Europe continues to lead the world in IVF’ with almost a half million cycles analysed from 2007. A preliminary report on world data for 2006 estimated current global ART activity at 1.5 million cycles per year, an extrapolation corresponding to around 300 000 babies born each year, and a cumulative total of 4.3 million since Louise Brown.

Such is the debt which infertility—and indeed ESHRE—owes to Bob Edwards. And now, in the award of a Nobel Prize, that debt is justly recognized. ESHRE offers Bob its warmest congratulations, both on behalf of the many professionals whose careers he helped shape and inspire, and the countless couples for whom IVF has finally brought fulfillment. Today, as the Nobel Assembly has said, ‘Robert Edwards’ vision is a reality and brings joy to infertile people all over the world’, a sentiment with which ESHRE is proud to agree.


doi:10.1093/humrep/deq328

---

**Editorial**

**Letter of appreciation: To Bob Edwards, Founding Editor, from André Van Steirteghem, Editor-in-Chief, Human Reproduction**

Dear Bob,

On 10 December 2010, the Nobel Prize of Physiology and Medicine will be officially delivered to you. A few minutes after the announcement on 4 October, a number of Belgian journalists called me and my immediate enthusiastic reaction was ‘This is great news, well deserved, and overdue….’ The importance of this news is that the Nobel Committee recognize your huge achievement in making it possible for many infertile couples to be relieved from the immense burden
of involuntary childlessness. The reactions in the press were very positive except for the Vatican. The best reply to this dogmatic stance was the responses of the patients who had conceived by IVF and related techniques. All of us working in the field are thrilled that your Nobel Prize can be considered a validation of the infertility treatments that became available through your pioneering work.

In this letter, I want to let you know how much we appreciate all that you have done—not just your pioneering research which has been well described in other tributes but also all your efforts in the following three decades which have ranged from continuing support for research together with teaching and lecturing to a deep concern for ethics and patient care.

I have had the privilege to work with you closely for 15 years (1984–1999), in ESHRE and also at my Alma Mater, the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB), which as an Honorary Doctor you called ‘my University’. Together with the late Jean Cohen, you were the Founding Fathers of the ESHRE. You were the first Chairman and I was a junior member of the Executive Committee. Because of very advantageous tax conditions for international scientific societies in Belgium, ESHRE has been registered in Belgium; we worked on the byelaws, the first two Annual Meetings (Bonn, 1985, see Fig. 1, and Brussels, 1986), the beginning of the Central Office in Brussels and the recruitment of Bruno Van den Eede as, at that time, the only permanent staff member. During the Annual Meeting in Bonn, the decision was made to have a Society Journal—‘Human Reproduction’. The energy and enthusiasm with which you made this happen comes out in the description of the early years of the journal (below).

I am sure you will remember the many visits to Brussels and the long discussions you had after the ESHRE Executive Committee Meetings in the ‘Fondation Universitaire’ in the centre of Brussels. For years, we travelled together to many meetings and I cannot forget the exciting discussions we had on future research projects, even late at night after dinner or at the occasion of a very early breakfast. Your brilliant mind was full of new ideas and one of your well-known questions you asked during the discussions was: ‘Are you still with me’. Honestly many times, Bob, I had to ask you to repeat your idea.

As Visiting Professor teaching reproductive biology in a postgraduate course at the Medical School of VUB, you came once a year to teach the students on Friday and Saturday, I assisted at all your lectures and we were all very impressed by the way you could communicate the fundamentals of fertilization, embryo development, reproductive genetics and many other emerging topics. You even talked about PGD several years before it became a reality. Many of the students are now senior faculty members at different Belgian Universities and even now they mention to me how impressive they found your capacities as a teacher.

Many research groups worldwide have appreciated your encouragement both personally and through your Editorship of the journal. You were among the first ones to be informed that we had ongoing pregnancies after what we now call ICSI. When I asked your advice where to publish the first four pregnancies you suggested The Lancet, mentioning that this was the Journal where you published the first successful IVF. We were both surprised to notice that fertilization following ICSI was so rapid in the human and we did a small study investigating whether calcium was a factor. This was published in an editorial in Human Reproduction in 1993. Most of the subsequent princeps studies of ICSI (ejaculated, epididymal and testicular sperm) were all published in Human Reproduction and some of them became citation classics. You also encouraged us in two other clinical research programmes involving VUB Reproductive Medicine and Medical Genetics: the prospective follow-up studies of all ART children and PGD.

It was clear from very early on that you considered the ethical issues deeply. On several occasions, I was witness to ethical issues discussed in the presence of Belgian ethicists and what was discussed there had an influence on the liberal attitudes in Belgium, for example towards embryo research. Your progressive ideas have been always full of respect for the human embryo in vitro, and many countries have admired the UK regulatory system that you encouraged.

Throughout the whole period of our association and in everything you do, your concern for the welfare of the patients is obvious as
well as your open social ideas on society. The last time we met was in London on 19 July 2008 at the National Infertility Day organized in recognition of 30 years of IVF. Both of us lectured at the meeting and our discussions afterwards were caught on camera (see Fig. 2).

There are many more ‘souvenirs’ of these years but space does not allow. Let me close by repeating my sincere congratulations on the Nobel Prize and sincere thanks from all of us.

Very, very best wishes,

André Van Steirteghem
Editor-in-Chief Human Reproduction

doi:10.1093/humrep/deq327

The early days of ‘Human Reproduction’

Helen K. Beard
Staff member, ESHRE journals

The first issue of Human Reproduction was published in 1986 while Bob was still Scientific Director at Bourn Hall. It was published by IRL Press for the then recently formed European Society of Human Reproduction and Embryology and the stated aim was to ‘sustain a high-quality journal devoted to research and debate on human reproduction’. The range of topics from sexual differentiation to embryonic development included ethics and law. Eight issues per year were published up until 1992, but by then, apart from frequent travels and regular writing assignments, Bob was devoted to the journal full time and from 1993 the journal was published monthly and began to expand.

In the beginning, the journal was run by two people from one small dimly-lit room in the stable block at Bourn Hall. Bob would sit on a hard upright chair by the window balancing the papers on his knee and issuing instructions to Caroline Blackwell at the typewriter as he read through each manuscript. Reviewers, carefully thought about by country and expertise, came from the top of his head.

The first computer and manuscript tracking system was installed in 1991 and the editorial revolution took off from there. The 1990s in Human Reproduction was a decade of intense hard work and rapid development. Bob took an interest in every aspect and every detail. He was first to arrive in the morning and last to leave at night. Reviewing procedures and manuscript checking routines were set up, many of which are still in place today. E-mail gradually simplified the editorial processes and speeded up responses and the sackloads of letters soon became a thing of the past. As in his approach to research, Bob was very mindful of ethics in publication and an ESHRE publications ethics committee was involved in dealing with various ethical cases from 1997.

The results of all this effort were apparent, in that the pages published annually rose from ~600 in 1986 to ~3000 by the late 1990s and the enterprise became profitable for the first time in 1994. Crucially, the influential impact factor of Human Reproduction began to rise (e.g. from 1.33 in 1991 to 3.65 in 1998) so that the journal was then in competition with long-established journals in the field, even though the reliability of these measures were questioned in an Editorial as early as 1993.

In 1996, when the number of editorial staff had grown to ~8, the roof of the stable block became in need of urgent repair and we were obliged to move. We were all quite sad to leave this iconic setting, especially Bob, but via his university contacts he managed to secure the lease of Moor Barns Farmhouse on the edge of Cambridge. This old farmhouse, complete with gardens, has a unique character and charm of its own and all of a sudden we were a dedicated editorial team with our own office.

At Moor Barns Farmhouse, Bob recreated the atmosphere of a thriving research group. There was no laboratory but new discoveries came through daily in the papers submitted. There were many interesting discussions and Bob initiated many projects with 1–5 supplements published every year between 1994 and 2000. He wrote many articles, reviews, books and editorials and gave the science-based editorial staff the chance to join in whenever he could. These were exciting times, with Bob and the field frequently in the news. Bob was very actively attending meetings around the world and we had many visitors who came to the farmhouse for discussions with him. By the end of the 1990s, he could be rightly proud of the growing reputation of the journal, although he was also acutely aware of its responsibility with regard to influencing clinical practice.

The maximum staff ratio during this time was one Bob to eleven staff—all women. Quite a management challenge! Working for Bob in the editorial office was never dull. It was always interesting, sometimes challenging and occasionally chaotic. Bob always tried hard to make the work fun and generally succeed. He was extraordinarily generous, regularly taking the entire team out to lunch paid for out