Editorial

Mission accomplished: over and out

Since Selena Gray and I took over the editorship in late 2007, JPH’s impact factor went from a nadir of 1.1 to having doubled to 2.0 today. We were ranked 79 out of 105 (25th percentile) in 2008 compared with 60 out of 161 (63rd percentile) last year in the ISI category ‘Public, environmental and occupational health’. While these numbers are encouraging and apparently important in the ivory tower of academic publishing, and in many ways influence potential authors’ decision to submit, they do not tell the whole story—in fact far from it.

Bibliometrics are fickle and belie too many tricks of the trade. Both of us have always felt it much more important to directly engage our subscribers. We wish to excite them with content that brings out a truly unique voice; a voice that at once takes pride in the Journal’s proud history while capturing the emerging essence of what has been called the ‘new, new public health’.1 We have been especially keen to be responsive since most regular readers did not explicitly sign up but receive JPH as part of the Faculty’s membership package.

Over the years we introduced three new sections, namely Perspectives, Chekhov’s Corner2 and Public Health Education and Training. The Perspectives column has sparked controversies ranging from modern day luddites in public health genomics to the persistent systemic failure in regulating breast milk substitutes everywhere. Anton Chekhov’s eponymous section has set out to celebrate and tease out ‘all of life and human relations’ that ‘have become so incomprehensibly complex’.3 Brian Hurwitz from the Centre for the Humanities and Health at King’s College London has recently joined our editorial ranks to curate this section. Not least our common future must be invested in helping the next generation develop into a better cohort than us, thus the third new section on education and training. From time to time we bandied about the idea of evolving into a monthly from a quarterly, although strategic considerations about the nature of publishing and the lack of a full-time editorial team and office staff warded off that urge every time.

Looking to the future, as a reader, I hope to be able to rely on JPH as the authoritative, independent voice in covering topics that would be as relevant in Beijing or Bolton, Mumbai or Merseyside.4 I wish JPH can become a serious influence on the global human development agenda by the time the post-2015 goals will have expired and need to be renegotiated.

I look forward to a new publishing platform that breaks out of the traditional modes (print or digital desktop) to take advantage of mobile apps and cross-linked multimedia content presentation; in other words how the rest of the world already communicates. I dream of a future where every paper published with our imprimatur will be first-in-class or best-in-class, much as big pharma aims to achieve in their product pipeline.

To realize these goals, we must keep an unflinching steer towards our core mission, that is to attract and publish high impact articles in the translational art and science and at the intersection of public health research and practice. Chekhov put it best when he said, ‘knowledge is of no value unless you put it into practice’. This is the very niche we have been pursuing in the past seven years. Sometimes we succeeded when other times we did not. The field is still nascent and will require patient tilling and careful nurturing from our successors, Eugene Milne and Ted Schrecker, both of Newcastle. Their professional backgrounds, respectively, in public health practice and in academia will stand them in good stead. Together with you our readers and contributors, we must further hone and better articulate our collective vision of JPH as a trusted broker of this particular domain of translational and transformational knowledge.5 We will likely require a new business model to spur innovation and to sustain excellence. We may even benefit from an existential rethink. Regardless we will need to aspire always, to experiment frequently, to fail occasionally and success will ultimately come.

It has been an honour, a privilege and an absolute delight. Over and out.

Gabriel M. Leung
Editor, 2007–14

References