

# Occupational and Environmental Medicine

## Editorial

### Occupational and Environmental Medicine

This is the first issue of the *British Journal of Industrial Medicine* under its new title *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*. Some changes are immediately apparent: the new title, new cover, and new size. Other changes in content and style will be taking place in the coming months. But before discussing changes, it is appropriate to say something about what has gone before. What is so special about the *British Journal of Industrial Medicine* that has made it one of the leading journals in occupational health worldwide? A crucial element has been its scientific rigour. It has developed a reputation for publishing the best papers, the most important findings, and the conclusions that stand up to critical scrutiny. Many of the papers that have made a real difference to thinking and practice in occupational health over the years have been published in the *British Journal of Industrial Medicine*. The series of *Editor's Choice* papers in the *Journal* during 1993 illustrate this point well. They have included seminal papers on solvent, lead, and mercury poisoning, occupational bladder cancer, coalworkers' pneumoconiosis, asbestos effects, air pollution, hazards of deep-sea fishing, and sickness absence.

The editors of the *British Journal of Industrial Medicine* have included some of the great names and top academics in British occupational medicine.<sup>1</sup> All of them have played a part in the *Journal's* continuing success. The latest, Tony Waldron, has guided the *Journal* from 1980 to the present. His contribution during more than a decade is enormous. Under his editorship, the *Journal's* reputation in the United Kingdom and worldwide has grown. It has become the first choice for publication of original papers among top researchers in the field in many parts of the world and is widely read by those wanting to keep up to date with scientific occupational medicine. Tony Waldron and the *British Journal of Industrial Medicine* have become synonymous and he will be a very tough act to follow.

We are all used to change these days; unfortunately many changes are not for the better. There are some who fear that changes to the *British Journal of Industrial Medicine* will inevitably lead to erosion of its high academic standards. *Occupational and Environmental Medicine* is committed to maintaining the high standards of its predecessor. The new journal is not so much a change of direction for the *British Journal of Industrial Medicine* as a development of existing ideas. An editorial in the January 1993 issue of the *British Journal of Industrial Medicine* looked back over the 50 years of the *Journal's* existence.<sup>1</sup> It has seen some lean times but has survived and thrived by adapting to suit the changing face of occupational health in the United Kingdom and abroad. In the early days, the main focus of published papers was on the classic occupational diseases, with investigations of workers exposed to high levels of harmful materials at work. The issues truly were mainly "industrial" and heavy industry at that. More recently, the emphasis has been on the

effects of low level exposures investigated either in humans or in animal or cellular models. The occupational health problems of workers in newer industries, such as the electronics industry and the service industries, have been addressed. Topics such as the effects of unemployment on health and work related stress are starting to be included. The time is now right for further development of the journal to reflect today's occupational and environmental health problems.

The concluding paragraphs of the January 1993 editorial<sup>1</sup> looked forward accurately to the present changes: the interest in environmental medicine is being made explicit in the title and contents, and the international nature of the *Journal* is being emphasised, with the dropping of the *British* from the title. The nature of environmental health hazards and the methods for investigating their effects are closely allied to the nature and investigation of occupational health hazards. The bodies representing occupational physicians in the United Kingdom are considering including "environmental medicine" in their names or stated aims. It seems timely, therefore, to include papers covering environmental issues in a journal for professionals in the occupational health field. In many cases, environmental health risks arise from industrial processes, as in the case of air pollution in eastern European cities. Or there may be health effects of exposures to people beyond the workers themselves, as in the case of mesotheliomas among families of asbestos workers in the past, or the controversial association between paternal irradiation and childhood leukaemia in Sellafield. Potential environmental health risks generate a lot of heat and often rather ill informed debate. The health effects are difficult to study but high quality studies are essential to inform appropriate action at individual and governmental level. *Occupational and Environmental Medicine* hopes to publish such studies.

*Occupational and Environmental Medicine* will build on the international reputation of the *British Journal of Industrial Medicine* and, in particular, will be encouraging contributors from eastern Europe and developing countries. Occupational and environmental health risks are known to be serious in these areas. The risk may be well known but there is plenty of scope for sharing detailed information from particular situations and presenting innovative methods of investigating and tackling problems. Advocacy to improve working conditions requires not just general information about the health risks of the materials being used but detailed information about local conditions and variables that may modify the health effects; this requires the undertaking of valid epidemiological studies in difficult circumstances. Study techniques that work in developed countries may simply not be applicable in developing countries; alternatives are being developed and their dissemination to the people who need them is important.

The functions of a journal are many and include

informing, educating, and, sometimes, entertaining its readers. Original papers are the mainstay of the informing function and will remain the main feature of *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*. But education requires something more and the educational function will be extended in the future by including invited articles by experts on issues of current importance and methodological papers relevant to research in occupational and environmental medicine. The correspondence section of the journal will be continued and even extended to allow debate on published articles and perhaps the publication of preliminary findings on important topics.

There is currently much interest in Continuing Medical Education in the United Kingdom. The Faculty of Occupational Medicine is consulting its members

about the desirability of some formal link with *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, recognising the importance of the *Journal* in Continuing Medical Education. Whatever its links with the Faculty, *Occupational and Environmental Medicine* will continue to be primarily a journal publishing original research findings. We hope that it will contain material that is interesting and educational for all occupational and environmental medicine researchers and practitioners.

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1 Anon. The British Journal of Industrial Medicine: 50 years on. *Br J Ind Med* 1993;50:1-3.



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