

Occupational and Environmental Medicine

Editorial

A year of *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*

The Journal has now completed a year under its new title of *Occupational and Environmental Medicine* and seems to be faring well. More papers were submitted in 1994 than in 1993 and the number of subscribers worldwide has remained steady in most areas and even increased slightly in some. This excludes the large increase in the United Kingdom due to Members and Associates of the Faculty of Occupational Medicine who now receive a copy of the *Journal* as part of their Faculty subscription. In a time of generally falling journal circulations the maintenance of the circulation of *Occupational and Environmental Medicine* is good news. We have made efforts to reduce delays during reviewing of manuscripts and delays to publication after acceptance. We are doing well in both areas but can still do better. We have now set ourselves specific targets: first news about the paper to be sent to the authors within eight weeks; and publication of accepted papers within five months. Performance against these targets will be audited during 1995.

Shortening of the review time is partly due to the excellent response of our reviewers who willingly undertake this arduous and often unrewarding task within tight time constraints. They remain helpful and good humoured even when being pestered for their responses and I am very grateful to them all. The names of reviewers who have helped the *Journal* during 1994 will be in one of the Spring issues. *Occupational and Environmental Medicine* will be joining other journals in the *BMJ* group in studies of the reviewing process. These may include, for example, evaluation of the effects and acceptability of blinding reviewers to the identity of authors, or conversely revealing the identity of the reviewers (with their consent). Hopefully, these studies will provide evidence for procedures that are at present either guesswork or "custom and practice".

Statistical reviewing has now begun. Papers that are potentially suitable for publication are now sent to one of a panel of statistical reviewers; the checklist they use was published in the November 1994 issue of the *Journal*. The comments of the statistical reviewer are sent to the authors together with the comments of the primary reviewers and, if appropriate, authors are asked to revise the paper accordingly before it is reconsidered. The statistical reviewers have access to the comments of the other reviewers to assist them. Their task will also be easier if before submitting papers authors consider them in the light of the published checklist and correct any problems they detect. We think that adding a statistical reviewer will not lengthen the review process beyond our target time but we shall be monitoring this.

Occupational and environmental health risks: measurement and communication

On 31 October 1994, the British Medical Association and *Occupational and Environmental Medicine* jointly organised a conference in London with the above title. Delegates came from an interesting mixture of specialities, including occupational medicine, public health medicine, safety, environmental health, and law. The conference began

with presentations about techniques for measurement of health risks, then considered topical occupational and environmental risks, and finished with presentations on communicating about risks to people who might be exposed to them. It became clear that although techniques certainly exist for estimating health risks these may be difficult to apply, especially for environmental risks where there is often inadequate or lacking data about exposures or exposed groups. Occupational risks from exposures can often be precisely estimated but the risks in practice need to be evaluated in each workplace. The risks facing health care workers were highlighted and the argument about just how many cancers are occupational in origin was considered. More general environmental risks can affect large numbers of people and their perception of risk can be distorted, as was well illustrated when considering risks from different forms of radiation. Health risks from air pollution are of concern, yet the concentrations of particulates involved seem so low that the epidemiological evidence of health effects is surprising. The difficulty of communicating about risks was raised when considering pollution episodes of food or water. This led to the fascinating topic of how different kinds of people perceive risk differently. It is clear that communicating about risk is a tricky business and we were reminded that "some people don't want to be reassured".

The conference attracted people who have not previously been readers or contributors to *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*. It may have shown some of the *Journal's* interests to them and they may now consider subscribing or, even more importantly, submitting work to the *Journal*. There are still few papers about issues of environmental medicine being submitted and we are keen to encourage more.

Methodology series in *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*

As explained in the editorial to the January 1994 issue, the *Journal* is committed to an educational role as well as its main function of publishing high quality original scientific papers. To this end, we are beginning a Methodology series later this year. This will consist of occasional papers about *how* procedures should be done (in disciplines such as epidemiology, occupational hygiene, etc) and *what* approaches have been taken to certain common issues in occupational and environmental medicine. Papers will be 2-3000 words in length and most will be commissioned by the editorial panel. The editorial panel for the series comprises two members of the editorial board, T C Aw and R McNamee, and the editor. We will be happy to consider proposals for articles for the Methodology series but authors should first submit a brief outline proposal to the editorial panel. Feedback about the new series and ideas for topics to be covered are welcomed.

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