

2002

Welcome to 2002 with *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*

2001 was a good year and there are exciting developments coming in 2002

In the anxious times prevailing as I write this, it seems strange to be talking about a "good year" during 2001. I hope that the world situation might be better when you read this in January 2002 but I fear it will not be.

Occupational and Environmental Medicine has had a generally good year during 2001. We made a modest contribution towards bridging the information divide between developed and developing countries, by arranging free access to the on line *Journal* for anyone in the World's 50 poorest countries. Some clever software called Digital Island identifies the source of a visit to the site and allocates free access as appropriate. My own contribution was to check in from Bangladesh and confirm that it worked. So far there have been relatively few "hits" on the site taking advantage of the free access; this shows that we need to do more to pull in readers from the developing world. We also need to do a lot more to increase the number of papers we publish from developing countries. Along with some of the other *BMJ* specialist journals, this is a challenge we are going to address in the coming year. It will not be enough to invite submissions. We need to help authors to produce material that is of a standard and with broad enough interest to be published in an international journal: it is quite a challenge.

There is continuing debate about the relevance of the impact factor as a means of ranking journals. At *OEM* we do not take deliberate steps to manipulate the impact factor. We have aimed to maintain scientific rigour and at the same time ensure "added value" for our readers. A pleasing side effect has been a steady rise in the impact factor over the past few years, so that it now stands at 2.16: very respectable for a specialist journal and putting us at the top of the rankings for comparable journals. We recognise that researchers are often judged partly by the impact factor of the

journals in which they publish their work, so we hope our higher impact factor will mean that we continue to receive the very best papers in the field.

Our continuing professional development (CPD) series is proving to be very popular. We have received letters about it and it is something that people I meet mention to me about the *Journal*. The series will definitely be continuing and we shall be incorporating topics—such as relevant statistical and epidemiological methods—that have been requested. Extensions such as interactive features through the website will be added over time. We welcome reader suggestions about topics to include in the series; they may already be on our list but if not we are happy to consider them.

One less positive experience during 2001 has been in the area of publication misconduct. Readers will know that *OEM* is signed up to the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) guidelines. Editors can submit cases to COPE for advice and during 2001 I began to feel that *OEM* was giving COPE most of its work. We have had several cases of duplicate or partially duplicate publication. In all but one case this was detected before publication in *OEM*. However, it is clear that these detected cases represent the tip of a large iceberg as authors, perhaps pressured by the need to publish for career progression, skate ever closer to the edge of acceptable practice and sometimes cross the line. We have also had a case (still being investigated as I write this) of potential malpractice on the part of a reviewer who allegedly had a financial interest in a paper being published.

The coming year also promises to be busy. We will be launching a new series entitled "The world at work". This will describe, with liberal use of pictures and other illustrations, the processes and hazards of different workplaces, and the methods used to control those hazards. The intention is to offer you the best "workplace visits" direct to your personal

computer. We intend this to be a truly international series. It will make particular use of the on line *Journal*, where illustrations will be in full colour and we will add other features over time. Personally, I am greatly looking forward to this series as I have always been fascinated to know what people actually do in their work.

One thing that people I meet are not positive about is the time it takes to get papers reviewed and eventually published in *OEM*. We recognise this as a problem. Before the end of 2001 I hope we will have completed a survey of authors to ask, among other things, their views about submission to *OEM*, and we expect that many of them will complain about the length of the process. I am pleased to say that help is at hand. Also before the end of 2001, we are introducing a new web based system for submission, review, and tracking of manuscripts. Authors will submit on line and the review process will be on line. There are many advantages of this system over the present one, not least that it should help to reduce the time to review papers and reach a decision about their publication. Our experience suggests that most authors submitting to *OEM* will be happy to do so on line, but there will be a facility for those who prefer to submit on paper. Details of the process will appear in the paper and on line *Journal*.

And finally, the thing you probably noticed first, especially if you are reading the paper *Journal*, we have a new design for *OEM*. This has taken some time to develop, involving input from the editorial board. Within the *Journal*, you will notice a different appearance to the papers. We hope that this makes them more attractive and easier to read. The globe on the new cover is intended to show our international nature and the pictures illustrate some of our areas of coverage. The chest radiograph shows silicosis, an old style industrial disease that is far from eradicated; the workplace shows one of the more modern working environments, with hazards of their own; and the photograph of smog over Santiago illustrates our interest in environmental health hazards. We hope you like the new appearance, and would welcome your feedback about this or any other matters concerning developments in *OEM*. You can reach us either through the website (www.occenvmed.com) or by writing to us in the old fashioned way.

A Cockcroft, Editor, *OEM*



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