

Thank You, and Good Night

Timothy Rowe, MB BS, FRCSC, Editor-in-Chief

When I became JOGC's Editor-in-Chief in January 2005, the world was reacting to the calamitous tsunami in Southeast Asia and Airbus was about to unveil its monster A380 aircraft. Later in the year, Angela Merkel became (gasp) Germany's first female chancellor. These were momentous events, to be sure, but for me, the future of JOGC was the primary consideration. With the wholehearted support of the SOGC Executive and with a committed and responsive new publisher, we were off and running.

And we haven't stopped. With buy-in from Canada's university departments and with consistent support from a wonderful stable of authors, the Journal has gone from strength to strength. I have watched with muted pride as the journal metrics we rely on have indicated a steady rise in JOGC's citations.¹ Readers have collectively and individually given us a thumbs up, and authors have told us how painless and rewarding the process of publication in JOGC has been for them. So, we appear to be on the right track.

The Journal was established as a communication forum for members of the SOGC, and from the beginning it offered a sense of community for Canadian providers of obstetrical and gynaecological care. It has subsequently become a face to the world, and that's a good thing. In communicating with authors, reviewers, and readers outside the country, I am conscious of the importance of upholding the Canadian brand, with its inherent characteristics of civility, respect, and willingness to help. So, every submission accepted for publication has been carefully edited to ensure that readers will get the maximum possible value from reading it. I make the assumption that the rejection of a manuscript is something that even a hardened and experienced author will find difficult, and a first-time author is likely to find rejection particularly hard. From personal experience, I know that this disappointment can be mitigated to a

certain extent by a personal letter of explanation from the editor, and so I have always made it a point to write personally to the corresponding author of every rejected manuscript. If the manuscript is rejected after peer review, the comments of the reviewers are almost always constructive, and these are relayed to the author; if the manuscript is clearly not suitable for publication and is not sent for review, the personal letter of explanation with pointers towards making it publishable can soften the blow, judging by the responses. The letter may not reduce the disappointment the author feels, but it will indicate that their work has been taken seriously.

In 12 years, the Journal has had two facelifts and one change of publisher, and, with an average of 96 pages per issue, has presented a lot of new information. This has included four FIGO issues focusing on international women's health. It has published 131 (or thereabouts) Images of the Month and almost too many original articles, commentaries, and guidelines to count. In curating all of that intellectual activity, I have been driven by the need to keep each journal issue interesting for readers. That, more than just about anything, must be the editor's goal.

A half-century ago, Richard Asher, a neurologist in the United Kingdom (and father of Jane and Peter Asher, for those interested in British pop culture) published a commentary in the BMJ with the title "Why are medical journals so dull?"² It might be argued that that was then and this is now, but I don't think so. Presenting readers with dull content is still an ever-present concern. In his article, Dr Asher noted that he was commenting on the pathology of this issue, not its treatment or prevention — but he did, nevertheless, include some pointers for avoiding dullness. He stressed the importance of a lively presentation, having clear and simple diagrams and tables, using simple expressions as much as possible, and ending the article before the reader's interest wanes. All of these are much more difficult than they sound, and authors (particularly first-time authors) often need help following these rules. But to keep the average reader engaged, follow them they must — particularly the "lively presentation" part. Whenever possible, an article should tell a story.

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Malcolm Gladwell has noted that there is a long intellectual food chain, with many contributors. Original thought is a fundamental contribution because without that very little gets done. Further along the food chain are those who contribute to the telling of the story, and, in many ways, these are as important as those who have the original idea. As Patrick Taylor, my editorial mentor, asked me some time ago (in an Irish kind of way): Do you think medical professionals prefer to learn something from a recitation of facts, requiring deduction, or from a story? Even sophisticated medical professionals such as JOGC's readers will go for the story every time. We go to meetings to hear from the best speakers, who also can tell a story; we don't go to hear someone stumble through a recitation of facts.

What I am getting at is this: one of the most important jobs of an editor is to make sure that every article in every issue is as story-like as possible. If a manuscript is submitted in a form that tells a story and engages the reader throughout, the editor's heart soars; if, as is more likely, it has to be turned into a story, then that's the editor's job. All the changes we make to an author's precious work are made with the goal of telling their story more compellingly and more succinctly. Using the active voice, avoiding use of jargon, and using simple words and expressions all help. Over the last 12 years, I have tried to ensure that authors tell their stories in the best possible way, and, happily, most have understood and accepted that.

Of course, the Editor-in-Chief doesn't produce each issue alone. I have had assistance from the very best and will always be grateful to Jane Fairbanks, Daphne Sams, Vyta Senikas, Martin Pothier, the members of the Editorial Board, the Editorial Consultants, and the International Advisory Board, all of whom have, over the years, provided me with essential support and advice. My successor as Editor-in-Chief, Togas Tulandi, is a member of the current Editorial Board, and he knows what I mean. With Togas's editorial experience, I know that JOGC will be in the finest of hands, and I wish him and his incoming advisors a long and happy sojourn.

It's been a very enjoyable ride, and I want to thank all of the authors, reviewers, and readers who have supported JOGC during my tenure for helping make JOGC the fine publication that it is. And as always, I hope that the future brings you professional satisfaction and personal happiness!

REFERENCES

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