ISMTE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY OF MANAGING AND TECHNICAL EDITORS

EON Editorial Office News

ARTICLE

# Improving Reporting Standards in Biomedical Journals

**by Jason Roberts, PhD**
*Managing Editor,* Headache
*Past-President, ISMTE*
*journal@ahsnet.org*

*In this first of two articles Jason Roberts examines the problem of poor reporting in biomedical journals, how it undermines otherwise good research, and what solutions are emerging to tackle this problem. The article concludes by addressing why editorial offices need to be a part of the solution. In next month's issue of* EON, *a second article will examine how editorial offices can institute reporting guidelines to encourage authors to raise standards.*

## What Are Poor Reporting Standards?

In recent years there have been very vocal campaigns to ensure authors include full disclosure statements with their submissions alongside calls for journals to promote ethical practices in publishing. As the publishing industry continues to strive towards greater transparency in peer review, coupled with increasingly competitive markets that force journals to constantly raise standards, a new movement is coalescing to improve reporting practices.[1] The origins of this growing debate can be traced to health science journals, but increasingly all scientific fields are examining the problem, specific to their own contexts.

Research published since the mid-1990s suggests poor reporting (though not necessarily poorly conducted research) is prevalent.[2] The problem is not just contained to

1 Simera I, Moher D, Hirst A, Hoey J, Schultz KF, Altman DG. Transparent and accurate reporting increases reliability, utility and impact of your research: reporting guidelines and the EQUATOR Network. *BMC Medicine* 2010; 8:24

2 Altman DG. The scandal of poor medical research. *BMJ* 1994; 308:283-284

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## *Improving Reporting Standards* *continued*

submissions under review. Retrospective studies of published material frequently reveal reviewers did not pick up reporting problems – this is perhaps inevitable as reviewers are also authors and the common errors are simply perpetuated.[3]

What constitutes poor reporting? Typically the problem is focused upon results that are undermined by omissions, inaccuracies, or ineffectual descriptions of research methodologies. This creates a major problem: It becomes difficult to replicate a study (a critical defect if the research ideas presented are ever to be expanded). Of equal importance, it is often impossible to discern how the results were obtained. For many readers this may weaken their confidence in the quality of the data and results presented. It may even lead them to question the veracity of the data. Additionally, poor reporting may obscure errors, biases, and other influences. As Loder and Penzien note:

> Good reports should contain a clear explanation of the study methods, describe statistical techniques in enough detail to allow verification of the results from original data, report all results, and interpret and present findings in a balanced and forthright way.[4]

Is this important? Clearly the *British Medical Journal (BMJ)* thinks so. A review of the initial triage of manuscripts at the *BMJ* by Elise Langdon-Neuner revealed all manuscripts were subjected to a methodological review to determine if the manuscript was worthy of full peer review. As part of an upcoming research project on reporting standards, the *Headache* editorial office (the managing editor and statistical consultant) determined that 79% of all rejections at *Headache* contained either a major or minor methodological concern. The most typical concerns include poor descriptions of research plans and the omission of crucial data alongside explanations of how it was obtained.

The rapid expansion in published research means the sheer volume of poorly reported material is likely to be massive. This fact generates significant consequences. For example, prescribing behaviors may be erroneously influenced. Alternatively, research projects may set off in the wrong direction based on faulty methodological descriptions. Very real concerns exist that standards are weakest at small or regional journals, yet these publications constitute part of the corpus of peer-reviewed literature. The published results are then picked up in major review articles and meta-analyses (a phenomenon termed *evidence upgrade*) and suddenly flawed reports are featured in practice-influencing articles. A common problem, admittedly caused by the additional issue of poor analytical practice in writing review articles, is that data from several studies are often pooled together. Incorrect inferences are then drawn because there may be significant differences in how data are collected between studies. This problem could be avoided if each study had described fully the method of data collection.

Weak reporting standards, it should be noted, are not just restricted to unsophisticated or inexperienced authors. It appears most authors are prone to making fundamentally simple, and correctable if spotted, errors. How do we know this? By looking at the evidence generated by the

3 Altman DG. Poor-quality medical research: what can journals do? *JAMA* 2002; 287 (21):2765-2767.

4 Loder EW, Penzien DB. Improving the quality of research reporting: *Headache* steps up to the plate. *Headache* 2009; 49:3, 335-340

emerging solution to this problem.

**Reporting Guidelines – A Solution**

Starting with the development of the CONSORT (Consolidated Standards of Reporting Trials) Statement in 1996, more than 100 reporting guidelines have been developed to fit every type of manuscript ranging from Randomized Controlled Trials to Observational Epidemiological Studies. What are reporting guidelines? Typically developed by a group of methodological experts in certain fields they are:

> [S]tatements that provide advice on how to report research methods and findings. Usually in the form of a checklist, flow diagram or explicit text, they specify a minimum set of items required for a clear and transparent account of what was done and what was found in a research study, reflecting in particular issues that might introduce bias into the research.[5]

The most widely-known guideline to date is the CONSORT Statement. Recently revised, it is a 25-item checklist for authors of Randomized Controlled Trials to consider when describing their research findings. The hope is that by following these checklists, authors can provide a more complete picture of their research or at least account for omissions in information. The CONSORT checklist is freely downloadable at: www.consort-statement.org/

Some sample criteria from the CONSORT Statement include:

- Eligibility criteria for patients;
- Completely defined pre-specified primary and secondary outcome measures, including how and when they were assessed;
- Type of randomization;
- The numbers of participants who were randomly assigned, received intended treatment, and were analyzed for the primary outcome;
- Trial limitations, addressing sources of potential bias, imprecision, and, if relevant, multiplicity of analyses.

The evidence is already in on the effectiveness of employing reporting checklists and the results are encouraging.[6,7] Consequently, a number of larger titles have begun to endorse one or more reporting checklists. How they ensure adherence to reporting standards varies between titles. Some insist authors supply evidence that their manuscript conforms to the information inclusion criteria outlined in reporting guidelines such as CONSORT. For example, the *Journal of the American Medical Association* and the *BMJ* both demand authors upload a copy of the relevant reporting checklist with their submission, be it CONSORT for a Randomized Controlled Trial or one of myriad other options. Other journals prefer to *advise* authors to consult the reporting guidelines appropriate for their study. The benefits of both approaches will be explored in next month's issue of *EON*.

Reporting guidelines do not necessarily correct problems inherent in a manuscript but they can illuminate where problems exist.

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5 EQUATOR Network *Introduction to reporting guidelines* www.equator-network.org. Accessed July 19, 2010.

6 Plint AC, Moher D, Morrison A., Schulz KF, Altman DG, Hill C, Gaboury I. Does the CONSORT checklist improve the quality of reports of randomised controlled trials? A systematic review. *Med J Aust*. 2006; 185(5): 263–267.

7 Egger M, Jüni P, Barlett C. Value of flow diagrams in reports of randomized controlled trials. *JAMA*. 2001; 285(15):1996-1999

# *Improving Reporting Standards* *continued*

Consequently they are a useful resource for authors, reviewers, and editors alike.

### Why Should Editorial Offices Get Involved?

Clearly, as editorial office staff, we look to ensure our titles provide superior quality peer review and publish, if not always the very best articles, then articles that have been substantially improved before publication. Implementing a reporting standards policy that includes endorsing the employment of reporting checklists represents a tremendous approach towards achieving that objective. Though studies are still under way to determine a causal link, one might speculate that if journals publish more articles written in such a way as to replicate the study, there stands a greater chance of citation.

Setting up a reporting policy is relatively straightforward (and will be discussed in next month's companion article). The job has been made easier by the creation of an organization called the EQUATOR Network. This group was created to provide a portal of resources to expand the use of reporting guidelines. Their express hope is that such guidelines become a widespread, and perhaps routinely used, facet of the submission and peer-review process. By visiting www.equator-network.org, a rich library of materials can be found ranging from the guidelines themselves, news of on-going research in the use and success of guidelines, and sample editorials from journals written ahead of their respective launches of campaigns to improve reporting standards. ISMTE and EQUATOR have promoted each other's activities in the past and will continue to do so in the future.

Busy editors, along with publishers who most likely cannot expend effort on something with no discernable opportunity for income generation, can spend little time to research the best approach to improving reporting standards, developing a comprehensive policy, and providing the necessary resources ahead of launch. For pro-active editorial office staff, this represents an excellent opportunity to take the lead on an activity with clear benefits for readers and authors alike.

## *Going to the ISMTE North American Conference?*

Meet with Jason Roberts from 8-8:30 a.m. on Wednesday, August 4, for a breakfast panel discussion on "The EQUATOR Network - how editorial offices of biomedical and science journals can help improve the quality of manuscripts for publication."

ARTICLE

# *Camping Out at EMUG 2010*

**by Deborah Bowman**
*Managing Editor*
GIE: Gastrointestinal Endoscopy
*dbowman@asge.org*

The eighth annual Editorial Manager® User Group (EMUG) meeting was held by Aries in Cambridge, Massachusetts, on June 17 and 18, 2010. This year marked the fifth time I had attended and I was accompanied by my editorial assistant, Caroline Gray. This was her first EMUG experience—this year, Aries allowed additional people from an editorial office to attend with no registration fee, with one paid registration, a very nice offer that enabled many to attend who otherwise would not have been able. Caroline looked around at all of the people greeting friends made at previous EMUG conferences and nodded wisely. 'I get it,' she said, 'it's like summer camp.'

We were welcomed first by Lyndon Holmes, CEO and founder of Aries, then by Tony Alves, Aries director of product management, who gave an overview of new and upcoming features of Editorial Manager (EM). Some new features in version 7.3, the version just released, are multilingual capabilities, more control over co-author information, the ability to search on submission flags, a discussion forum option, and enhanced reporting capabilities. This update was followed by the most popular session for many people, the Features Workshop. This is the opportunity for attendees to give their EM wish list for future releases.

After lunch, participants had a choice of attending an EM Boot Camp, for those new to EM, or choosing between breakout sessions. The first two options were 'Co-author Workflows,' where new EM features for managing co-author information were explored, and 'Portal Functionality,' which investigated cross-journal functionality and reporting. The second round of breakout sessions featured two more options: 'How Do I Configure…,' in which a team of Aries experts answered specific workflow questions from participants, and 'QA Workflows,' where tools and features that could improve manuscript quality control were reviewed.

These breakout sessions were followed by guest speaker Kent Anderson, whose name might sound familiar because he spoke at the North American ISMTE conference last summer. His topic at EMUG was 'Use of Social Media by Scholarly Journals and the Implications for Peer Review.' His thought-provoking premise was that 'peer review' has come to mean much more than the traditional pre-acceptance article reviews we all rely on. Instead, in this time of social media, positive peer review can be a 'Like' post of the journal's Facebook page; a comment, a blog post, a tweet, a podcast, a video, an iPhone or iPad message…all are now forms of peer review that may be even more effective—and certainly more immediate and more widely visible—than the traditional kind. Social media, he said, will separate the published articles from the weak, as opposed to platforms like PubMed that post everything without the chance for

ARTICLE

# Camping Out

continued

commentary. As you might have guessed from my enthusiasm, this was a favorite session of mine; it made me think about social media in a different way, especially relevant since my journal and society use Facebook and Twitter™.

Thursday evening, Aries hosted a cocktail reception, held outside in a lovely garden until rain chased us inside. This reception was a great opportunity to meet and visit with other editors in a relaxed setting.

On Friday, the conference reopened with a brief update of ORCID: Open Researcher and Contributor ID, a registry which aims to solve author name ambiguity (which John Smith is it?) by using unique identifiers for researchers to be used across journals. This was followed by a session on the new reporting capabilities coming in EM version 8.0, which will include greater control over the data sources and greater graphical rendering of report results.

In the next session, Rebecca S. Benner from the journal *Obstetrics and Gynecology* discussed her team's strategies for author submission. They have created a booklet called *Guide to Writing for Obstetrics and Gynecology* that covers all aspects of their submission process. They send these booklets to authors upon request and also distribute them at their annual meeting. The editorial team sets goals for their publication times and keeps a close eye on these goals, trying to meet or exceed them constantly.

The Friday morning breakout sessions consisted of 'EM Ecology,' which covered how to improve manuscript workflow by using external tools such as Author Resolver and ICMJE disclosure forms, and 'Proposal Workflows' and 'Managing the Author Invitation Process.'

After lunch, Carol Ann Meyer from CrossRef discussed the CrossCheck feature and explained how it could be integrated into our workflows. Later breakout sessions covered (1) an introduction to Commerce Manager, an upcoming feature that will extend the functionality of EM to solicit, track, and collect payments such as submission fees, open access fees, page charges, and color charges; (2) an opportunity to dig more deeply into the upcoming improved analytic reporting features; and (3) a session called 'Optimizing People Records,' in which we discovered optional ways of collecting valuable information about our authors, reviewers, and editors.

At the end of the second day, Aries representatives gave an overview of EM version 8.1 (the version coming out in a few months), followed by Aries' closing remarks. It was time to say goodbye to friends, old and new, until the summer of 2011 at the ninth annual EMUG meeting. Summer camp had come to an end.

***EON is seeking column editors for the Tips & Tricks and Publication Partners columns. The column editor is responsible for recruiting the column's articles. Interested? Contact the Editor, Kristen Overstreet, at kristen.overstreet@mac.com. We look forward to working with you!***

# *Four Tips for Hosting an Effective Webinar*

**by Tim Cross**
*Product Manager, Allen Press*
*Membership Chair, Council of Science Editors*
*tcross@allenpress.com*

As seen by its widespread use over the past couple of years, the Web-based seminar, or webinar, has become a commonly accepted presentation modality in the business world. What began as a technology developed for Web conferencing is now standard practice for marketing and sales communication. It's also a great tool for professional organizations that provide education and training.

For those in the process of hosting a Web-based presentation for the first time, the following tips are suggested to help create a positive webinar experience.

## Be Clear on the Goal

A good beginning point for planning is to ask some simple questions. Why are we doing a webinar? What are we trying to accomplish? What are the expected outcomes? One common reason for hosting a webinar —in an era of shrinking society and publication budgets—is that it offers an affordable alternative to traveling for seminars. But this is not the only benefit. If a professional organization only has one annual meeting or conference, for example, the webinar offers a great way to stay visible during the rest of the year and maintain a connection with members. It also can be provided as an enhanced benefit to members, opened to the general public to reinforce the organization's presence as a resource in the field, or explored as a possible new revenue stream. And a webinar is timely. It can be put together fairly quickly to address recent developments or trends in the field without waiting until a formal organization meeting. It functions as a way to present one-off sessions separate from the larger conference or meeting as well.

## Know Your Audience

Once the decision has been made to host a webinar, an important thing to consider is the audience. Who will be watching the webinar? Will they be professionals seeking continuing education? Will they be decision-makers? Will the information be basic for those who have little knowledge of the topic or more advanced? Knowing this is critical. Unlike a formal conference where the demographics are somewhat known in advance, the online nature of Web-based seminars means participants could potentially come from all over the map, literally and figuratively. One solution to this might be to manage registration by limiting who the event is marketed to. But a more productive solution is to write a concise and detailed session description clearly defining who the intended audience is and what information will be covered.

## Change Your Presentation Style

As the webinar is a new media, it calls for a new approach. In a talk to a live audience, where everyone is in the same room, eye contact, rapport, and the speaker's physical presence are crucial factors in communicating

## *Effective Webinars*

*continued*

the message. A fair amount of text on the screen is required unless the presenter is going to read extensively from notes. With a webinar, however, there is a disconnect in some sense and the audience has no speaker to visually focus on. To hit the mark, the presentation needs to engage the audience in a different way. An emphasis on graphics and dynamic elements is essential. The images and slide design must be compelling and make a point. Text on the screen can be reduced or even eliminated in some cases because the information can be narrated by the presenter in a way that would be clumsy in a live talk. If a Web cam is a feature of the meeting technology being used, an even higher level of engagement is possible.

Another great way to engage the audience is to include interactivity. Web meeting applications typically include polling and chat features. Polls can be created and compiled on the fly, and the data incorporated into the session. Using the chat feature, questions can be submitted by participants and answered at the end of the session. Or, to create a more informal workshop feel, questions can be answered in real time.

### Be Seen and Heard

The last important factor to consider in hosting a successful webinar is how to market it. It obviously won't be successful if no one shows up. One way to get the word out is to post it to the online industry calendars of professional organizations. Using social media can yield positive results as well. The most effective and direct way, however, is a well-crafted e-mail announcement sent to a targeted list of potential attendees.

Clearly, the success of any presentation is largely dependent on powerful and relevant content delivered by a capable speaker. But preparation and planning is critical, too. Being clear on the goal, knowing the audience, adapting an appropriate presentation style, and developing a focused marketing campaign are all important factors in hosting and creating an effective webinar.

# *Using Technology to Increase Meeting Participant Interaction*

**by Robin Ross**
*Director of Technology*
*American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy*
**and Deborah Bowman**
*Managing Editor*
GIE: Gastrointestinal Endoscopy
*dbowman@asge.org*

As members of an editorial team, we all appreciate the benefits online submission systems like Editorial Manager® and ScholarOne™ Manuscripts have afforded us. One advantage is the ability to have editorial teams with members located all over the globe. However, great benefits bring great challenges.

One of the challenges in supporting dispersed teams is keeping them abreast of what is happening, especially as new members join the team. The editor-in-chief (EIC) of *GIE: Gastrointestinal Endoscopy* (GIE) changes every five years, and the new EIC chooses his/her own team of associate editors. These editors all need to be trained in the online submission system and need to be taught our workflow. Our budget doesn't allow for us to travel to each of their offices to train them, so when the new team prepared to begin working on articles in August 2009, we looked for a cost-effective way to show them the system.

Our Society decided to try some form of video or Web conferencing instead of an onsite meeting. We knew this new format would both eliminate the travel expenses associated with an onsite meeting and would also minimize the time the busy doctors would need to take away from their work. The expense reduction from eliminating the travel costs was significant, and it was estimated to more than cover the costs associated with the video conference call. Furthermore, adding some form of video and or Web sharing enhanced user participation.

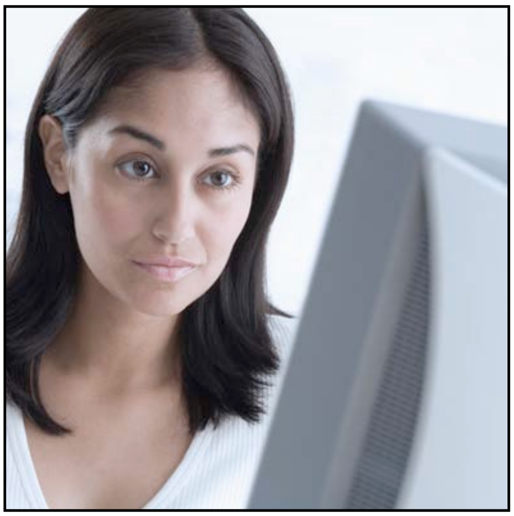
The American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy technology team undertook a review of the possible options to meet the requirements. The possible solutions ranged from a Web event that could cost more than $10,000, to hosted solutions that could be free, or at least very low cost. The Society began a closer examination of the services offered by our audio conference calling provider, which was InterCall at the time.

Our audio conference calling partner also provided webcasting/webinars as well as video conference calling services. Both Web options were examined and were found to have the capability of showing presentations and various documents. However, webinars are more limited in the ability to share a desktop or to allow participants other than the presenter to interact with the presentation. Because we wanted a more collaborative, more fluid, and free-flowing capability, we chose the video conference call as the solution that was more cost effective and that better met our

## *Increasing Meeting Participant Interaction* *continued*

needs. The video conference call has the added benefit that participants with Web cameras can transmit their images to the other participants. The solution we used was based on the WebEx platform.

Establishing the session was very simple because our partner provided a self-service portal to create the call. The Society's IT team worked with the GIE editorial assistant to perform the initial call setup through the portal. The call setup included entering the e-mail addresses of each participant. Once the event was ready, the invitations were sent through the meeting portal. Participants received individualized links to the event. As the meeting date approached, reminder notices were automatically sent according to a pre-planned schedule.



The conferencing provider also included online training, and some time was spent with the GIE editorial assistant, who performed the role of call leader (*i.e.*, the person who invited participants, started the call, and transferred screen control), to ensure she was comfortable with managing the meeting and transferring control. The editorial assistant acted as the meeting facilitator/moderator because this freed the GIE managing editor to concentrate on running the meeting.

During an event, there are two main methods for sharing information with the participants: pre-prepared presentations and sharing the desktop. Our training event made use of both capabilities. The main presentation, a PowerPoint created by the managing editor, was saved to the video conference portal and converted to a flash presentation.

On the day of the meeting, the final agenda and presentations were copied to the portal and the editorial assistant, acting as the call leader, started the call. Any participants who connected to the meeting early saw a copy of the agenda. Once the meeting started, the call leader was able to coordinate the presentations as well as pass control back and forth with other meeting participants. In this case we used our audio conferencing service in addition to the Web conferencing element to ensure all participants had audio as well as Web participation, making it possible for anyone to ask questions at any time. When the call started, the managing editor was able to control what each participant saw on their computers, including the cursor, making it possible to walk them through the entire workflow expected of them in Editorial Manager®.

Feedback from the participants was very positive; they felt they were able to understand the workflow expected of them and had the opportunity to ask as many questions as necessary. More importantly, when the new team started handling articles about a week later, questions were of the 'Remind me...' variety, rather than the 'I'm completely confused' kind. The transition went smoothly with no lag of workflow and with a minimum of disruption to everyone's busy schedule.

COLUMN: *Portrait Of An Editorial Office*

# *The Bipolar Editor*

**by Helle V. Goldman, PhD**
*Editor-in-Chief*
*Polar Research*
*helle.goldman@npolar.no*

If I were to take the regular title of this column literally, I would describe the editorial office of *Polar Research* as a small room inhabited by 26 plants (mostly cacti and other succulents, which tolerate the generous quantities of neglect with which I shower them) and me. Wedged in among the prickly vegetation are bookcases, shelving, and a computer. A large window almost fills the outer wall, offering a magnificent view over Tromsø Sound. This strip of water divides the island of Tromsø from mainland northern Norway. My office building – the headquarters of the Norwegian Polar Institute – is about 370 kilometers north of the Arctic Circle.

The city of Tromsø boasts the world's northernmost university, botanical garden, brewery and, I daresay, editorial office for an international, peer-reviewed journal. (Please correct me if I'm wrong!) During the brief, intense Arctic summer here, the sun stays up 24 hours a day. As we move toward winter, my office window frames fantastic sunsets, which occur earlier every day until, late in November, the sun peeks above the horizon for the last time until its return in mid-January.

These extremes, and the intervening periods during which day length changes by more than an hour with each passing week, have been wreaking havoc on my circadian rhythm since I first arrived in Tromsø 13 years ago. I was then relocating from Tanzania – the archipelago of Zanzibar to be more precise, just a few degrees shy of the Equator. I'd undertaken my doctoral research in anthropology in Zanzibar, and, later, when I was employed as a consultant for a conservation project, I met my Norwegian husband there. Ah, now *that* was a place with a humane daylight regime: a cycle of about 12 hours of darkness followed by about 12 hours of daylight repeated itself with monotonous regularity throughout the year. I never slept better.

Please pardon the geography lesson (and my apparent obsession with light and darkness). As it happens, the scope of the journal I edit – *Polar Research* – is largely defined geographically. Since its inception some 28 years ago, *Polar Research* has been publishing papers reporting research pertaining to the Arctic and Antarctic regions. The journal's staple fare has traditionally been original research articles in such disciplines as oceanography, glaciology, biology, geology, and atmospheric science. As an anthropologist, I've been easing more social science into the journal, broadening its disciplinary scope. Another change I implemented was to make *Polar Research* more international. Whereas the

# *The Bipolar Editor* *continued*

journal's first years were marked by a predominance of Norwegian- and other Scandinavian-authored papers and reviewers, *Polar Research* is now very international in terms of its authors, reviewers, and readers.

The way the journal has been run has evolved during my tenure, and the tasks I've carried out in this editorial office have changed accordingly. When I was hired by the Norwegian Polar Institute as the journal's 'chief' editor (there were no other editors of any kind) 12 years ago, submissions arrived at my office on paper, in three copies, along with the text on a floppy disc. I mailed paper copies to reviewers and I sent decision letters on paper to the author, along with the reviewers' marked-up copies of the manuscript. (One of these heavily marked-up manuscripts was lost in the post; I thenceforth saved photocopies of them.) I edited accepted manuscripts on paper to begin with, but early on I switched to editing on-screen.

I was (and remain) a fairly heavy-handed editor. A significant proportion of the journal's contributors are (1) not native English speakers and/or (2) scientists at early stages of their careers. I sometimes overhaul whole paragraphs to make them more clear and concise, I rearrange passages to improve the flow of the argument, I fix up incomplete references, and I polish up the writing (rather than merely sweeping it for errors). I examine the graphics to make sure all the elements are understandable at the dimensions at which each figure is to be printed and to ensure spellings, capitalization, and abbreviations used in the illustrations are consistent with *Polar Research*'s house style and with the main body of the article's text. I modify figures in Photoshop and Illustrator, and when figures are of hopelessly poor quality it has sometimes proven easier for me to create new ones from scratch rather than to keep trying, fruitlessly, to extract usable versions from the authors. The contributors generally express warm appreciation for my efforts to improve their presentations – but maybe they're just saying that to appease me.

In the early years of my editorship, after tidying up an accepted manuscript, I mailed it to our printers in the UK. In due course, they mailed me paper proofs, which I would correct and mail back to them.

In addition to these tasks, I was developing *Polar Research*: gently stretching its scope, organizing special issues associated with important conferences, figuring out how to increase the journal's international visibility, and always seeking to improve the quality of the journal in every way I could.

A few years later a major change occurred when, to curb costs, the decision was taken to switch to a local printing company. In addition to my other editorial duties, I took on the role of compositor; after accepting a paper and editing it, I would then lay out the text and graphics using InDesign. I sent the material for each issue to our Tromsø printers in PDF (including the cover, which I would update for each issue) and they would print it.

Meanwhile, climate change was becoming an ever hotter topic, and the crucial role of the polar regions in climate change was more and more widely recognized. As the world geared up for the International Polar Year of 2007-08, the largest international scientific initiative ever undertaken, the big publishers who lacked polar journals hustled to acquire them for their stables. Several made overtures to this editorial office. Attracted by the

## *The Bipolar Editor* *continued*

prospect of relinquishing my duties as typesetter, publicist, and marketer – none of which I had any great talent for – I engaged in discussions with several publishers. The Norwegian Polar Institute finally settled on a partnership with Blackwell, which merged with Wiley shortly thereafter. My days as a one-man-band were – phew! – over.

In 2007, with Wiley-Blackwell shouldering much of the work I had once been responsible for, I could devote myself to modernizing the journal. I started processing submissions through Manuscript Central (now ScholarOne™ Manuscripts). Long gone were the days of paper copies of manuscripts being mailed back and forth – and sometimes vanishing in transit – across the Atlantic.

Wily-Blackwell provided the support I needed to establish the international Editorial Board I had been envisioning for years. I set up a board comprised of six Subject Editors and me. Located in Germany, the United Kingdom, Australia, Norway, Canada, and the United States, the Subject Editors are all busy scientists with regular jobs. For a modest honorarium, they shepherd the submissions I assign to them through the review process and make recommendations on them. I monitor the progress of each submission and offer the Subject Editors guidance when a manuscript seems to be stalled at some stage of the process.

The journal has benefited enormously from the involvement of the Subject Editors, and I'm deeply appreciative of the expertise, enthusiasm, and fresh ideas they've brought to *Polar Research*. We meet once a year to review the recent progress of the journal, to discuss plans for the future, and to share an Asian meal – this year it was sushi. The different perspectives the Subject Editors have brought to bear on the journal – they hail from far-flung parts of the globe and from diverse disciplines – have been invaluable in boosting the journal's current standards and future prospects. With the Subject Editors' help, I set up a larger international panel of Editorial Advisors. This is a valuable resource we have yet to adequately tap.

I continue to read through all the accepted manuscripts and edit them as needed, but I appreciate knowing that the skilled freelance copyeditor Wiley-Blackwell has assigned to *Polar Research* will give each paper a thorough going-over after I've dispatched the paper to the publisher. She catches errors that I miss and makes excellent suggestions for improving the clarity of the text. I leave to her such tedious but important tasks as cross-checking the citations and references within each article. I read and correct all the proofs and go through all the authors' corrections to their proofs. I find authors often correct their proofs incorrectly! This is typically because they're unaware of the journal's spelling or capitalization preferences or haven't fully digested the journal's reference or citation style. The compositors who implement proof corrections aren't responsible for catching these kinds of mistakes.

So here I sit in my editorial office on a small island in the Norwegian Arctic. I have gladly delegated much of the work of evaluating submissions to my six Subject Editors. The journal's publisher, in the United Kingdom, handles everything to do with marketing and subscriptions, maintaining the

## *The Bipolar Editor* *continued*

journal's website, getting the journal laid out (in Hong Kong), and having issues printed and distributed (from Singapore).

The uninitiated reader might assume I now have less to do in my job than ever before – I can lean back in my stylish Scandinavian-design office chair and leisurely take in the dramatic vista of sea and snow-covered mountains. Alas, as many of you managing, technical, or other kinds of editors can surely attest to, this is not the case! Submissions are way up, and they need to be checked in and nudged through the review process; our ScholarOne™ Manuscripts site has to be updated to the latest tweaks to the system; complementary books for book reviews are streaming in from publishers; proposals for special issues have to be given careful consideration, and so on.

There is always more to do – and less time in which to do it. This is as true for me as it is for *Polar Research*'s Subject Editors, the contributors, the reviewers, the copyeditor, the compositors, and everyone else involved. Authors – scientists keen to add publications to their CVs so they can secure good jobs and cement their professional reputations – demand ever shorter turnaround times from submission to decision and they expect to see their work published, online anyway, very quickly. Journals compete with one another to rapidly publish exciting papers, which can result in higher Impact Factors and more subscribers.

As time-saving technology advances – the lightning-fast communication afforded by the Internet, for example – we humans scramble to keep pace. The treadmill is always moving a little faster. My editorial office is now supported by 20% of an assistant (80% of her time is dedicated to serving as the Norwegian Polar Institute's webmaster). This is a great help, but even so it's a struggle to stay on top of things, let alone to plan ahead. I'm not unique: This is our common condition in these modern times. An article published in Wiley-Blackwell's *Publishing News* and republished in the April 2010 issue of *EON* illustrates this very well. Allen Renear and Carole Palmer explain that scientists 'sometimes appear to be surfing the literature almost as if they were playing a fast-paced video game,' usually hoping they *won't* find an article they need to read in full.

I was recently invited to speak in Boston at a gathering of the New England chapter of the Explorers Club; I was able to accept because this coincided with a family visit in nearby Providence, Rhode Island. At the urging of the vice-president of the club, I covered two disparate aspects of my professional life: For an hour I reviewed the colorful history and current cutting-edge research of the Norwegian Polar Institute and then I talked for 30 minutes about my past anthropological and zoological investigations in Tanzania as well as the piece of wilderness I own on the margin of Botswana's Okavango Delta. I made no attempt to tie these two halves of myself together. My audience of explorers were evidently not perturbed by this hodge-podge of ice cores and polar bears, witchcraft and leopards. Some of them probably have first-hand experience of a similar disjunction between one's day job and one's non-paying intellectual passions.

*Polar Research* is bipolar in its scope and its editor is perhaps bipolar too, at least in the

COLUMN: *Portrait Of An Editorial Office*

## *The Bipolar Editor* *continued*

sense of being profoundly engaged with two geographical extremes (the polar regions and Africa). One thing is sure: The job is not static. We're now considering a bold change for the journal: making all its content freely available to everyone on the Internet and doing away with the print edition. *Polar Research* would be the first polar journal to take this step. Some people (including me) will miss having a printed journal to hold in their hands, but these days most of our readers are probably scanning our article titles and abstracts online to find out what they really need to read and save. Simultaneously, awareness of the environmental costs of print production and distribution is growing. Both these reasons – modern reading patterns among scientists and our carbon footprint – make it difficult for us to justify printing *Polar Research*. There is also mounting pressure to make the results of publically funded science freely available to the public. This is very much in keeping with Norway's principles of openness and nonexclusivity.

Making *Polar Research* open access would put us ahead of the curve in the rapidly evolving field of scientific publishing. I look forward to the challenge of adapting this editorial office to the exciting changes that are coming down the pike. My plants may, however, wish I had a bit more spare time to water them.

# *ISMTE Annual Meetings - 2010*

## It's time to register for the European Conference!

**Registration:** Log in to register if you are a current member of ISMTE, have been a member in the past, or have attended past ISMTE Conferences. (Don't know your username or password? Use the 'Lost Password?' link to find your information. New to ISMTE? Create an account here.)

**Click here to see the conference agenda.**

## Oxford

**October 19, 2010** at St. Hugh's College.

# Calendar of Events

**ISMTE US Conference**
**3-4 August 2010**
Washington, DC, USA
www.ismte.org

**International Academy of Nursing Editors**
**11-14 August 2010**
Brisbane, Queensland, Australia
www.nursingeditors-inane.org/events.html

**Reporting Your Randomised Trial**
**10 September 2010**
Oxford, UK
www.equator-network.org/courses-events/courses-and-events/

**Getting the Most from Journal Publicity**
**15 September 2010**
London, UK
www.alpsp.org

**Licensing Digital Content**
**22 September 2010**
London, UK
www.alpsp.org

**Commissioning Book and Journal Content**
**28 September 2010**
London, UK
www.alpsp.org

**Fundamentals of Journals Finance**
**30 September 2010**
London, UK
www.alpsp.org

**Effective Journal Editorial Management**
**21 October 2010**
London, UK
www.alpsp.org

**ISMTE European Conference**
**19 October 2010**
Oxford, UK
www.ismte.org

**Project Management for Publishing**
**3 November 2010**
London, UK
www.alpsp.org

**Editing Medical Journals - Short Course**
**10-12 November 2010**
Oxford, UK
www.pspconsulting.org/

**Fundamentals of eProduction**
**24 November 2010**
London, UK
www.alpsp.org

**Journal Development**
**29 November 2010**
Oxford, UK
www.alpsp.org

*Do you have something to add to the calendar?*
*Contact the Editor: kristen.overstreet@mac.com.*

## ISMTE *EON*





*A note on English: ISMTE aims to be a truly international society. English will represent our lingua franca, but we would like to stress that in materials published in* EON *or online that variations in idiomatic usage and spelling should reflect the origins of the author. No one version of English is preferred over the other.*

ISMTE Executive Office: 107 Mantua Pike Ste. 701 # 122, Mantua, New Jersey, USA 08051-1606
Phone: +1 856 292 8512 Fax: +1 856 292 8513, E-mail: ismteoffice@gmail.com

## *Contact Information for ISMTE*

**Leslie McGeoch, Executive Director**

*International Society of Managing and Technical Editors*
1107 Mantua Pike Ste. 701 # 122, Mantua, New Jersey, USA 08051-1606
Phone: +1 856 292 8512, Fax: +1 856 292 8513
E-mail: ismteoffice@gmail.com