EDITORIAL:

Tempus fugit – 5 years as Editor-in-Chief

As my 5-year appointment as Editor-in-Chief of the *Annals* comes to an end in July, it is perhaps time for a period of reflection. I have found the experience pleasurable and regard it as an honour to have been Editor-in-Chief during this time. Nevertheless, as shown by the figures below, the post is onerous, albeit satisfying.

On taking up the post, I indicated my aim of promoting a quality technical, practical and clinical journal for all specialties designed to provide up-to-date information both for trainees as well as established consultants. My desire was to ensure that all surgeons are kept abreast of advances not only in their own field but also in other specialty branches of surgery. Only the readers can determine if this aim has been achieved. In this regard, all members and fellows will shortly be receiving a request to complete an online reader survey designed to obtain views on both the *Annals* and *Bulletin* and specifically what changes might be introduced to improve style and content.

A total of 3940 manuscripts have been submitted during my tenure of which 908 were accepted and published (23% acceptance rate). For those authors who have not made it into print, I hope you have received both clear and constructive reasons for this that have gone some way to assuage your disappointment. Although the number of issues of the *Annals* increased from six to eight per year to accommodate an ever-increasing number of manuscript submissions, the time from submission to publication can still be long for those accepted for publication.

During the last 5 years, there have been huge developments in electronic publishing and this will undoubtedly continue for many years to come. Our journal website was receiving approximately 3500 viewings per month in 2004 whereas in 2008 over 20,000 abstracts a month were viewed on average. We have also seen the introduction and growth of FastTrack which has resulted in the happy circumstance, as of the March issue, of there being no backlog of articles awaiting publication once they have been accepted. The online version of the journal is now firmly in place and all back issues are available for readers to refer to as necessary. It is often said that the print journal will become obsolete. I doubt this. The convenience and pleasure of handling a print version is still paramount.

During my tenure, I have been supported by an excellent team in the *Annals* office. Particular mention must go to past and present publishing team members David Atkins, Tara Nikovskis, Hannah Chinery, Matt Whitaker and Adam Brownsell, all of whom have contributed hugely and made my life much easier. Gill and Bruce Haddock as a production team have provided a high quality and efficient service.

I have relied upon the generosity of many hundreds of reviewers in providing views on individual papers, but the decision to accept, revise or reject has been my own. I am sure I have made mistakes in this decision-making process but I can assure readers that all decisions were based on peer review and my own unbiased and hopefully balanced opinion.

Twelve pet hates

All editors have their pet hates and I am no exception. Readers may be interested in my personal top 12 pet hates as Editor-in-Chief. This is based not only on my experience as editor of the *Annals* but also as Editor-in-Chief for 9 years of the *European Journal of Surgical Oncology*.

1. Papers containing numerous annoying typographical and grammatical errors, indicating a lack of care and attention by the authors.
2. ‘Salami’ publications. The same data produced at regular intervals with further follow-ups (often at 2–3-yearly intervals).
3. Audit papers masquerading as research with no attempt to provide information on closing the loop hence demonstrating worthwhile changes in practice.
4. ‘Me-too’ papers merely confirming, yet again, what is already known and accepted, *e.g.* audits of laparoscopic cholecystectomy.

5. Papers which have been submitted but obviously not seen by all the authors, especially the senior author. This is recognised by poor and non-critical discussion of the data as well as by numerous typographical and grammatical errors.
6. Telephone surveys. These are becoming increasingly common but are tedious and are not particularly helpful even if the questions posed are interesting.
7. Plagiarism, fabrication and fraudulent data often picked up by vigilant reviewers. These must not occur and authors are advised to be careful to avoid any of the above since editors have a responsibility to consider whether fitness to practice issues have arisen which would necessitate referral to the GMC.
8. Unnecessarily lengthy and verbose papers at a time when space is so limited. Authors are advised to be succinct.
9. Case reports which are described as 'first reported case' when a simple PubMed Central search reveals numerous previously reported cases. They are an unnecessary addition to the literature.
10. A lack of insight by authors who are unable to accept a rejection and then embark upon increasingly acrimonious email correspondence.
11. Tardy reviewers. If a reviewer is unable to deal with the paper within 2 weeks it should be returned. No offence will be taken and editors have the opportunity to send the paper to another reviewer within a reasonable time and hence avoid author frustration.
12. Reviewers who provide no evidence or background information for their decisions and merely tick the box. If the paper is either accepted or rejected, the reasons for this decision should be made clear so the authors can reflect on their work.

I would like to thank all the *Annals* board members for their contributions during the last 5 years. I am particularly grateful to Colin Johnson as review editor, Tom Dehn as controversial topics editor, Bruce Campbell for technical tips and NICE news, Linda de Cossart for regional meetings and Richard Gibbs for internet reviews.

I am delighted that Colin Johnson will be taking over as Editor-in-Chief of the *Annals*. He is very familiar with workings of the journal and I have no doubt will make an exceptional editor. I wish him well.

IRVING TAYLOR

Editor-in-Chief