New series about medical publishing

5 January 2015 heralds the 350th anniversary of medical journal publishing. It is therefore timely that the *Annals* will be running a new and innovative series about medical publishing throughout 2015.

The year 1665 was a landmark year for medical publishing. On 5 January Denis de Sallo printed *Le Journal des Sçavans* under a pseudonym, which is cited as being the first published scientific journal. The journal had a broad remit and de Sallo informed his readers from the outset of its purpose of publishing European book reviews, writing obituaries of famous people, mentioning new observations, experiments and discoveries, and disseminating decisions made by the religious and secular courts.¹ Although exactly how 'scientific' the journal was is debatable, its position as the first medical journal is not.

Only two months later, the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* was published on 6 March 1665. This is regarded as the first scientific publication in the English language. It was believed to be the official journal of the Royal Society but in fact this journal debuted as the personal project of Henry Oldenburg, the then correspondence secretary of the Royal Society and the journal's first editor. His job was to read letters received by the society at their meetings and to inform those who did not attend of the content of these letters. It seems practical that he should have thought to bundle them into some sort of publication to disseminate them rather than writing multiple copies.¹

Most members of the Royal Society were wealthy gentlemen but Oldenburg was not. It is believed that his publication was a means of making money. I have seen the first issues of this historical publication and was amazed at the similarity with publications now in terms of style, pagination, the use of italics and even a table of contents. Oldenburg may also be regarded as the father of peer review as he frequently sent manuscripts to his colleagues to solicit opinions from those who were more knowledgeable in the area of question.

It seems that little has changed in 350 years. Our ambition to disseminate information remains, as does the style in which we do this. As academic publishing sprawls into an international industry with revenues into billions and a constellation of open access and internet driven publishers, perhaps even the motive of Oldenburg to make money remains?

Science has never been so inundated with information as our quest and hunger to learn ever more about the universe in which we live (and beyond) continues. For the present time at least, traditional subscription-style journals, like the *Annals of The Royal College of Surgeons of England*, still dominate the publishing world.

It is therefore a privilege to bring you some practical and useful articles by some very well known names during this anniversary year on how to go about this business of publishing. It is also my honour to introduce Pippa Smart, who will be a guest editor for this publishing series. Pippa is Editor-in-Chief of *Learned Publishing* and a publishing consultant specialising in editorial strategies and copyright issues. She provides training for editors and publishers around the world, consultancy services for individual journals and publishers, and also writes a monthly newsletter for the publishing industry on behalf of the Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers. She sits on the Council of the European Association of Science Editors and is a non-executive director of Practical Action Publishing. I know that we at the College will benefit tremendously from her publishing knowledge.

I do hope that you will enjoy this forthcoming series.

Reference

1. Kronick DA. *A History of Scientific and Technical Periodicals: The Origins and Development of the Scientific and Technical Press, 1665–1790*. New York: Scarecrow Press; 1962.

Jyoti Shah
Commissioning Editor