Environmental epidemiology

Introducing a new journal, and a tribute to John Goldsmith

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A new journal

We are pleased to introduce a new journal—ENVIRONMENTAL EPIDEMIOLOGY—which is launched as an online-only, fully open access companion journal to EPIDEMIOLOGY. ENVIRONMENTAL EPIDEMIOLOGY has been enthusiastically adopted by the International Society for Environmental Epidemiology (ISEE) as one of its official journals.

Why start a new journal now? After all, we are all nowadays flooded by a deluge of invitations to publish our work in this or that obscure journal that no one has ever heard of or even to become members of the invariably prestigious editorial boards of such journals. Clearly, ENVIRONMENTAL EPIDEMIOLOGY has no wish to join this race to the bottom of scientific publishing. Establishing links with ISEE as the main global professional organization in the field, and as a companion to an established general epidemiology journal, underscores our ambition to become a high-quality well-respected journal in the wider public health arena.

One major argument to establish a new journal is that the field of environmental epidemiology continues to grow. Hundreds of environmental epidemiology papers are published every year, yet there are only a few journals specifically devoted to environmental epidemiology or environmental health. As a result, many environmental epidemiology papers appear in clinical journals or in environmental science journals; this is not necessarily a bad thing, but a significant fraction of these papers did not make it into the established environmental health journals not by lack of quality but simply by lack of journal space. We wish to emphasize that EPIDEMIOLOGY will continue its commitment to publishing research in environmental epidemiology. There is simply too much good work submitted to EPIDEMIOLOGY in this topic area, which largely motivated the decision to launch a companion journal. ENVIRONMENTAL EPIDEMIOLOGY will offer authors a new outlet for their work, with the same standards for quality as its companion journal and with the assurance to authors that their papers will be handled by editors and reviewers who are current in the topic area, understand the importance of

the research, and are well qualified to evaluate the methodologic rigor. Our mission statement, which is available on the journal's home page (www.environmentalepidemiology.com), further expounds on our commitment to these ideals.

As a companion journal to EPIDEMIOLOGY, ENVIRONMENTAL EPIDEMIOLOGY will largely follow the editorial policies that have been tried and tested over the years by EPIDEMIOLOGY. The instructions for authors reflect these policies, and prospective authors are encouraged to take notice of these instructions when developing their manuscripts.

The importance of being an official journal of ISEE cannot be underestimated. Since it was founded now almost 30 years ago, ISEE has developed into the major global environmental health professional organization in the world today. Annual ISEE conferences travel the globe, attracting ever-increasing crowds of participants and serving as a training ground for young scientists eager to join this thriving field. We are pleased to publish in this inaugural issue an analysis of research trends in environmental epidemiology by Professor Manolis Kogevinas, the current ISEE president, on the basis of work presented at the last annual ISEE conference in Rome.

As mentioned, ENVIRONMENTAL EPIDEMIOLOGY will be an online-only open access journal, which reflects growing trends in the scientific publishing arena. This publication model shifts the operational costs from contributions generated by subscriptions to contributions generated by authors. The author fees associated with publishing in ENVIRONMENTAL EPIDEMIOLOGY are relatively modest compared with charges levied by many open access journals in the public health field, and many research grants now support budget items meant to support author fees for open access publications. One important feature of the link with ISEE is that ISEE members will receive a 20% discount of the author fees. As we consider the ISEE community to be a very important part of the authorship and the readership of the new journal, we trust that this agreement will be beneficial to both the society and the journal.

For better or for worse, the journal impact factor has become an important consideration for authors in deciding where to submit their manuscripts to. As a new journal, ENVIRONMENTAL EPIDEMIOLOGY will not have an impact factor for the first couple of years. We trust, however, that we will be able to attract sufficient high-quality, well-cited publications to ensure a decent impact factor for the journal in a few years' time. Then again, the impact of research can and should be looked at from many more angles than just the question of how often the work is cited in the first few years after publication by other colleagues in the field. In fact, we would be very interested in receiving contributions outlining how the scientific and societal importance of studies in environmental epidemiology can be qualified and/or quantified by other means than counting citations.

Epidemiology is the science of public health. Single studies, however, rarely, if ever, produce convincing findings that by themselves are sufficient to recommend changes in public health policy. That is why in the instructions for authors, you are gently advised to not make such recommendations at the end of your paper. Nevertheless, public health policymakers are a prime target audience for the collective enterprise of environmental

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epidemiology. So we would like you to think hard about how your study can be a building block for a specific public health policy to address some particular threat to public health as it may exist today. Typically, you may wish to include some arguments to this effect in the cover letter that accompanies your submission to ENVIRONMENTAL EPIDEMIOLOGY. We also remind authors that fully developed policy papers are welcome; it is only short and inevitably superficial policy recommendations in research papers that we ask authors to avoid.

A tribute to John Goldsmith

Finally, we are very pleased to be able to pay a tribute to John Goldsmith by reprinting one of his more philosophical articles about environmental epidemiology, which was published now exactly 50 years ago in the *American Journal of Public Health*. John is considered to be one of the founding fathers of modern environmental epidemiology, and he was instrumental in getting ISEE off the ground in the 1990s. To honor his contributions to the field and to the society, ISEE established in 1999 the “John Goldsmith Award for Outstanding Contributions to Environmental Epidemiology.” This annual award is for sustained and outstanding contributions to the knowledge and practice of environmental epidemiology. This award recognizes environmental epidemiologists who, like John Goldsmith, serve as models of excellence in research, unwavering promotion of environmental health, and integrity.

In his 1967 article, Professor Goldsmith starts with the following quote:

Because of the many changes occurring in our environment, the epidemiologic evaluation of the effect of various environmental agents on human populations becomes of ever-increasing importance.

This statement is as true today as it was 50 years ago. Environmental epidemiology continues to play an important role in identifying risks to public health of a wide array of potentially harmful exposures. Professor Goldsmith illustrates basic principles of environmental epidemiology by providing elegant summaries of risks associated with ionizing radiation, carbon monoxide, sulfur oxides, and particles, but also of high temperatures, a topic still very relevant today. Already in 1967, Professor Goldsmith was hinting at the increasing global character of environmental changes as they might affect public health by referring to the “metamorphosis of the planetary habitat.” As a further stimulus to reading this historic article, we quote its concluding sentences, which we think have not lost any of their relevance even 50 years later:

The social urgency for the development and flourishing application of environmental epidemiology derives from the rapid, often unplanned and frequently drastic changes which man and his technology are making on the planet which is his habitat. We may poorly understand the consequences of this metamorphosis, but we cannot be excused from the obligation to improve our understanding and to act on it. Environmental epidemiology is a discipline which is useful in guiding the metamorphosis of this planetary habitat.

We hope you will enjoy reading this inaugural issue of ENVIRONMENTAL EPIDEMIOLOGY, and we look forward to receiving your contributions.

Conflict of interest statement

The authors declare that they have no financial conflicts of interest with regard to the content of this report.