

Essays in the Art and Science of Academic Journal Editing and Publishing

A Case Study in Journal Editorship

The European Journal of Surgical Oncology (EJSO), 2003 to 2009

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Introduction

I have written this series of Working Papers on the Art and Science of Academic Journal Editing and Publishing in order to preserve and pass on my knowledge and experience of the unique professional challenges of journal editorship. I therefore hope that this essay will be of some interest, value and guidance to others who may wish to take up the challenges. The technologies and the publishing environment have changed significantly since 2009, but the core principles of editorship are enduring.

In the previous essay in this series, I described my preparation for Journal Editorship between 1996 and 2002, and the training and education that I believe to be valuable in the preparation for such a role.

In January 2003, following a competitive interview process, I was promoted to the role of Editor in Chief of the European Journal of Surgical Oncology (EJSO) on the retirement from the role and with the generous support of Professor Irving Taylor of University College Hospital, London, and formerly Professor of Surgery in Southampton (1980-1994).

In this essay, I seek to communicate the steps that were taken to modernise and grow the journal with digital systems, and to highlight and summarise the lessons learned. The successes of the strategy which I developed and implemented were measured in the transformation of the distribution and global reach of the journal, and in the notable increases in its manuscript flow and citation metrics.

About the EJSO Editorship

The EJSO is published on behalf of the members of the British Association of Surgical Oncology (BASO) and the European Society of Surgical Oncology (ESSO). They share the ownership of the journal with the publisher Elsevier on a 25/25/50% profit sharing basis. The Editor must therefore answer to and balance the various interests of three separate organisations as shareholders in the success of the journal.

The EJSO Editorship is a stipendiary role for a working cancer surgical specialist. Throughout my time in post (2003-2009), I was employed in the UK National Health Service

as a full time Consultant General Surgeon and Surgical Oncologist, with specialist interests in Breast Cancer and Endocrine Surgery. I had no timetable concessions to my editorial role, which was exercised around my clinical practice in Southampton.

In parallel with my civilian employment, I was a senior member of the small cadre of surgical consultant reservists who supported the operational work of UK Defence Medical Services through two parallel conflicts in Iraq and in Afghanistan, in which UK service personnel were heavily involved, and in which the skills and specialist experience of the territorial clinical cadre were in considerable demand. I was therefore deployed to the Gulf between March and May 2003, and subsequently to Helmand in Afghanistan in January and February 2008. With good communications, I was able to continue to exercise my duties for the EJSO during my operational tours.

The State of the EJSO in early 2003

In January 2003, the EJSO was a regional multi- speciality journal for clinical research and practice in the surgical cancer disciplines. The journal was in satisfactory financial health with a subscription and print based publication model. Professor Joop van Dongen of the Netherlands Cancer Institute was the Chair of the Editorial Board at that time.

The EJSO had a circulation of some 2000 print copies per issue for society members and institutional subscribers (academic libraries), along with an as yet under-developed presence on the internet on the IDEALFirst platform. Hard copies of the journal were distributed by post at considerable cost to individual members of BASO and ESSO, and to subscribing libraries. The processing of manuscripts was paper based, with all of the inefficiencies that followed from this, and digital distribution and office systems were still in their infancy. The print edition remained central to the EJSO publishing plan in 2003. Our subscribers were accustomed to the regular receipt of a high quality hard copy issue in return for their money.

The readership of the journal was therefore generally limited to subscribers and to those who could access copies in libraries. Copies of specific articles would need to be requested by mail from the authors or from national reference libraries. Electronic access to content

and to downloads was very limited to experimental distribution systems, including the early version of the Elsevier ScienceDirect platform.

In terms of metrics, the Journal was processing around 300 manuscripts per annum in 2003, including a significant proportion of case reports. It was in the process of moving from eight to ten issues per annum. The year on year rejection rate was around 50%, The Journal Impact Factor was nearly 1.4, and the journal ranked in the 70s for surgical journals.

In terms of competition, there were a number of Surgical Oncology journals which were our direct competitors for content, including The World Journal of Surgical Oncology (published by Biomed Central); The Annals of Surgical Oncology (published by Springer); The Journal of Surgical Oncology (published by Wiley); and Surgical Oncology (also published by Elsevier).

The Role of Elsevier BV in the Development of the EJSO from 2003 Onwards

In administrative terms, the journal was also at a significant inflection point in its development. Elsevier BV, headquartered in Amsterdam, had recently taken over the publication rights from Harcourt. The company was making major global investments in a digital transition programme, as exemplified by the development of the ScienceDirect digital publishing platform, and in the early version of the Elsevier Editorial System (EES). The Internet and new web technologies were subsequently to create a huge opportunity for the development of the EJSO. They enabled digital distribution, promotion, public access, cost savings and the administrative operation from manuscript submission to publication.

The management of all Elsevier Science journals was being consolidated through 2002-03 in a bespoke office building in the Kidlington Science Park on the outskirts of Oxford in the UK, to which we moved the entire EJSO publishing process directly from Prof Taylor's office at UCH. This move brought a number of immediate benefits. The publishing operation was now centred in a fully staffed and professionally run business environment. Peter Harrison was the senior publishing manager, and Ruth Beer was our Editorial Assistant. They brought considerable skills and experience to the management of the journal, and they were generously supportive of the strategy which I set out. The day to day management of

manuscripts was managed by a team of trained administrative staff. Kidlington was readily accessible to me from Southampton when I needed to meet with the management team.

My vision for the EJSO in 2003

The Editor of an academic journal must have a vision for the direction of the Journal and must be able clearly to express **the Aims and Purpose of the journal**. These must be founded in a realistic understanding of all of the factors which determine the place of the journal in the professional community which it serves, and of the academic and commercial marketplace in which it must be sustained (Rew 2003a).

A journal is also at heart a business, which requires the investment of resources and skills to serve its competitive academic market, and which may succeed or fail in its purpose. A rigorous analysis of the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats to the journal, otherwise known as a SWOT analysis, is a good starting point from which to develop a clear understanding of the business and to generate and implement a development plan.

The Editor must also be willing and able to **communicate this vision** and the strategy to the community of people who use the journal. These include the subscribers and readers; the owners and publishers; the editorial team, the editorial board and the reviewers; and the authors, both established and potential. Therefore, working with Peter Harrison, I informed the Boards of BASO (through the then President Mr David Rosin) and of ESSO of the operational and editorial changes at the journal, and the expected implications for the finances of the journal and for the experiences of the subscribers.

I worked through the **Editorial Policies** of the journal, the Aims and Scope of the journal, to ensure that they were realistically aligned to our title, our editorial capacity and to our specialist ambitions.

I next addressed the **Instructions and Guidelines** for authors and for reviewers, with reference to the forthcoming move from paper-based to the very unfamiliar processes of digital manuscript management, and the online completion of reviews.

The Advisory Boards of the Journal

In February 2003, Peter and I examined the membership of the Specialist Editorial Advisory Board, which we wanted to modify so that we had two specialist advisers in each major subject field (for example, colorectal cancer). We also looked at a General Advisory Board of those with particular skills and influence to offer, including the representation of regional interests.

We were keen to ensure that every member of each board was involved and proactive in advancing the interests and growth of the journal, rather than simply occupying “grace and favour” seats on the Board. We considered renewal term limits of five years and an informal appraisal and assessment process, to provide focus on their duties to the board members, and to provide a fair and efficient way of releasing those who were not demonstrably contributing to the Journal. In practice, we were able to retain and “repurpose” most of our 40 existing board members, releasing five others and noting retirement of four senior members.

I was also keen to extend the time that was available for meaningful meetings and discussions, with quarterly meetings at various locations. This ambition was never achieved on practical grounds of cost and convenience, but it would have been much easier to realise in the era of Zoom and Teams.

The next task in February 2003 was to generate and circulate a Discussion Document and SWOT Analysis on Editorial Strategy for the journal for 2003-2004. I set out our present position and some reasonable and achievable objectives. These included fulfilment of the digital change process; and increasing our publication frequency to 12 issues per annum; I aimed to improve the quality of writing and author-led editing that would be central to the wider acceptance and use of the journal.

I noted that the “European” component of our title no longer fully reflected our developing worldwide projection on ScienceDirect. I also championed the adoption of the subtitle “The Journal of Cancer Surgery”. This phrase more clearly distinguished the EJSO in a crowded commercial market of similarly named Surgical Oncology journals.

The Quality of Writing for the Readers of the EJSO

Early in my Editorship, I introduced my ambitions to improve the **Standard of Presentation and Written English** in the journal, noting in our rewritten Instructions to Authors that “the publication of concise, elegant and attractive English is a key aim of the Journal...in general terms, shorter manuscripts communicate their message more effectively” (Rew 2003b).

In general, the quality of writing for academic journals is substandard in communication terms. Language and information layout are often not used to best effect. There is a common misperception that the use of long and technical words and phrases is indicative of intelligence and erudition, whereas the opposite is really the case. Your intended readers are bombarded in the real world with information which demands their attention, and the short, concise paper with a clear message and supporting evidence will have the greatest impact. In scientific writing, the old adage applies: Less is More.

I therefore set out a revised set of **Instructions for Authors**; which considered the scope for improvement in every aspect of a submitted manuscript. This included:

- refinements to article titles to make them a clear and accurate indication of the content. Titles which were posed as a question were generally discouraged, not least because the answer posed by the question was usually No.
- formally structured and concise Abstracts, which set out the background, the Methods, the Results and Conclusions which accurately reflected the content of the paper rather than unfounded aspirations.
- conventional IMRAD (Introduction, Methods, Results and Discussion) structure for contents, in which I also focussed rigorously on encouraging authors:
 - to keep to those points in the Introduction which were specific to the study in hand and which did not contain commonplace generalisations about the nature of the cancer under study
 - limiting the Materials and Methods section to the key elements of the study
 - to use clear tables and diagrams without duplication of the text
 - to avoid repetition of Results in the Discussion
 - to moderate the Discussion to realistic deductions and to avoid excessive speculation
 - to use concise and focussed reference lists.

I was conscious that shorter manuscripts would also make more efficient use of our page budget, and thus expand the number of articles per issue. I was aiming for a word limit of 3000 words and a limit of five tables and figures and 30 references, to further focus the authors on concise writing.

The Digital Transformation of the Journal Infrastructure and Distribution

In early 2003, we were in a position to take full advantage of the Elsevier digital publishing and distribution processes. These included:

The ScienceDirect Platform: ScienceDirect was provided by negotiated subscription as a large bundle of Elsevier journals to University and other organisational libraries. It permitted the global distribution of electronic versions of journals and articles to all subscribing institutions at internet speeds and at marginal cost when compared with print. Its content would be made available by those institutions directly to their students and to academic staff. The EJSO was added to the ScienceDirect bundle as our oproduction went digital, and our access to the worldwide surgical oncology community of potential readers was transformed.

The Elsevier Editorial System (EES): The management of EJSO manuscripts was gradually moved from a paper based to the bespoke EES, which evolved through a number of iterations from 2003 onwards. EES allowed the author to upload the manuscript electronically; for it to be distributed to reviewers; and returned for processing to final publication (or rejection).

EES imposed discipline and clarity on the transit of manuscripts, from their registration as raw documents, through the various review and improvement processes, to the release of the final product. We were now able to measure, manage and accelerate transit times of manuscripts through the system with total visibility. However, simple tools for manuscript editing were not available and “red inking” and corrections remained a paper based exercise.

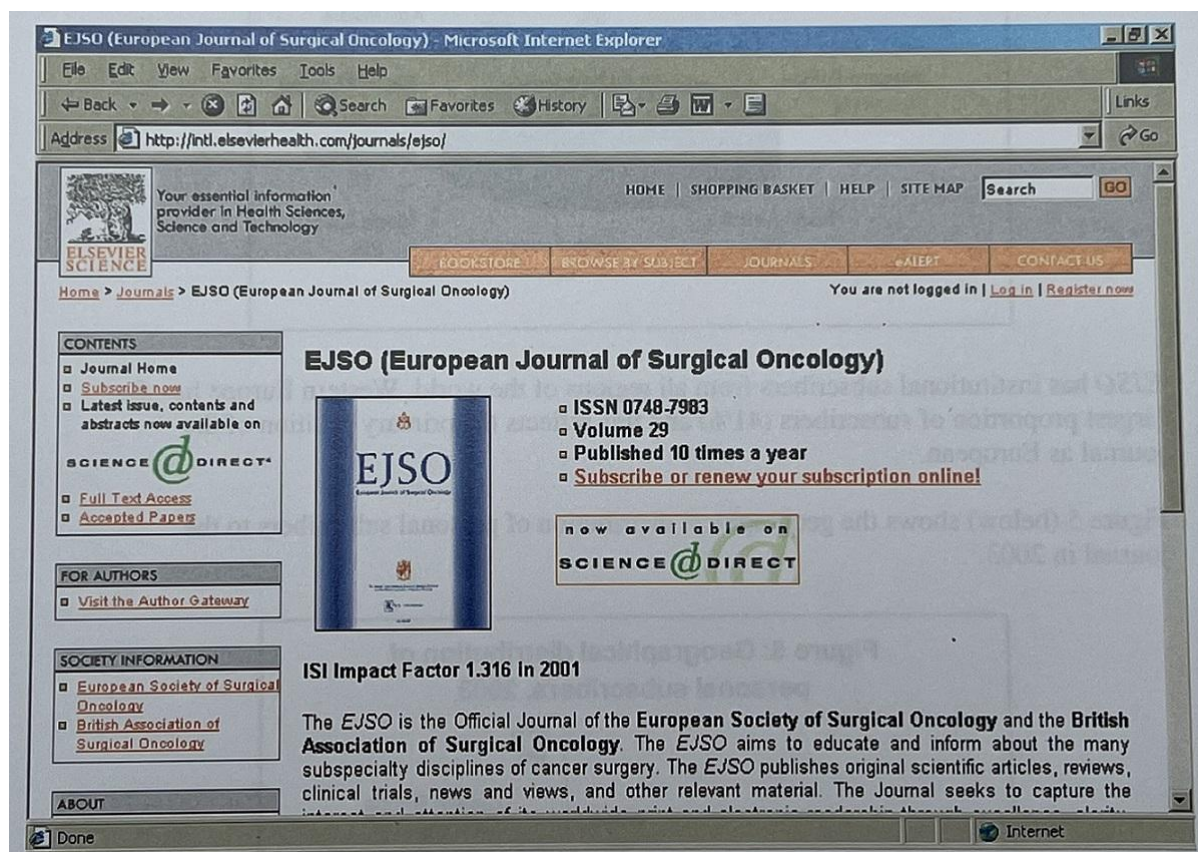


Figure 1. Screenshot of the new EJSO web page in 2003

The EJSO Website: The first bespoke website for the EJSO went live on the ScienceDirect website at the end of June 2003 as a membership benefit. It nevertheless had many of the design features which are still recognisable in websites in the 2020s.

A Reflection on the Consolidation of Surgical Oncology Titles

During July 2003, I corresponded with the UK based Editor of the Elsevier journal “Surgical Oncology”. There was considerable overlap of the published content between the two journals, and I wondered whether there was scope for amalgamation , given that the World Federation of Surgical Oncology Societies published the synonymous Journal of Surgical Oncology. My approach was somewhat speculative and ultimately inconsequential, given the many vested interests and impracticalities. I am pleased to note that all three journals continue independently to thrive in 2025, as evidenced by their data on the SCIMAGO website <https://www.scimagojr.com/>

My strategy for the Editorial Improvement of Submitted Manuscripts

I recognised from the outset that my freedom of movement was primarily constrained by the manuscript flow; by the quality of presentation of the published papers; by their originality (or otherwise) and interesting content; and by the fact that many authors were not writing in their primary language, or had no particular expertise in academic writing.

The solution lay in improving the clarity and readability on receipt of all manuscripts. I took a rigorous approach to reading and “pre-editing” all manuscripts and (where appropriate) returning them to the authors BEFORE sending them out for review. I took the view from my own experience of reviewing poorly edited manuscripts, that the reputation of the journal would not be enhanced in the eyes of reviewers, if they were to receive low quality manuscripts which could have been “pre- enhanced” with better titles, better writing and more supportable conclusions, for example.

This approach would take hard graft and a rigorous approach to refining the quality, focus, presentation and readability of individual manuscripts. The success or otherwise of this strategy would be measured over years, and I estimated a five year cycle of evolution to demonstrate convincing results. I therefore undertook much manuscript editing was on paper copies.

EJSO Board Meetings in 2003

On 24th July 2003, we held a telephone conference call from Kidlington for the Associate Editors to discuss the proposed strategic direction of the journal. The call was joined by Cornelis van de Velde (The Netherlands), Lars Holmberg (Sweden) and Zen Rayter (Bristol, UK), and the general plan was well supported when circulated to the non-attendees.

The annual Editor’s meeting was held at the Bella Convention Centre in Copenhagen on 22nd September 2003, in conjunction with the ECCO 12 conference of the European Cancer Congress Organisation. The performance data for the previous year were discussed. The total circulation of the journal for 2002 had been 1822 personal and institutional recipients.

- The Impact Factor for 2002 was 1.4.
- The journal was ranked 79 out of 114 oncology journals and 141 Surgery journals by the institute for Scientific Information (ISI).
- The print circulation had fallen to 1663 subscribers in 2003 as ScienceDirect gained momentum.
- We introduced a new standard Elsevier format for the layout and fonts for articles.

The Editor has the freedom to publish explicit editorials and updates. I decided to use an annual "Review of the Year" Editorial every year to communicate directly with our readers and to report on developments and intentions.

My End of Year Editorial for 2003

In my first Editor's report, at the end of 2003, I was able to state that:

"2003 has been a year of considerable progress and development for your Journal. The EJSO is the dedicated voice for a broad community of surgeons whose professional practice encompasses the care and management of patients with cancer...

Our first achievement has been to set out a strategic vision for the Journal, with the support of our joint owners, BASO, ESSO, and Elsevier. We aim in time to become the worldwide journal of choice for authors and readers alike for scientific, clinical and newsworthy papers and articles across the entire spectrum of disciplines related to cancer surgery.

To this end, we now employ the scale and reach of our publishers to promote ourselves and to distribute our content across the Internet throughout the world. We are now receiving articles from every continent and can no longer be considered a solely European journal....

In quantitative terms, there has been a 20% growth in manuscript submissions in the past 12 months. We hope to be in a position to move to monthly publication by 2005 if these improvements are sustained. At 1.4, the impact factor has achieved a very respectable value for a specialist professional journal, and we expect this to continue to improve as we broaden our appeal and readership....

The EJSO is committed to bringing excellent science, clarity of insight, and stimulating debate to the community of clinicians with an interest in the surgical management of cancer. Your contributions are always welcome, as imaginative authorship and well crafted words are the lifeblood of this process" (Rew 2004a).

The EJSO in 2004

The Board next met at the Novotel Budapest Congress Centre on 1st April 2004, in conjunction with the 12th Congress of The European Society of Surgical Oncology, ESSO. I was able to report that manuscript flow for the first quarter was over 100 documents, of a seemingly improving quality. We also had a series of Special Issues with Speciality Editors in the pipeline, including:

- Quality Assurance in Cancer Surgery (Guest Editor Cornelis Van der Velde)
- Sentinel Node Biopsy for Breast Cancer (Guest Editor Robert Mansel)
- Symptomatic Guidelines for Breast Cancer (the BASO Breast Group)
- Oncoplastic Guidelines for Breast Cancer (Guest Editor Lee Martin, for BASO)
- A sponsored supplement (Volume 30 Suppl 1, 2004) on the UK NHS Cancer Services Collaborative Improvement Partnership and Redesign of Cancer Services (Guest Editor Clive Griffith, Newcastle UK).

The draft BASO Oncoplastic Guidelines were an early test of my editorial mettle, both in respect of commercial practicalities around the cost of production and distribution of a supplement to the main journal (£10-15,000) and in respect of the scientific rigour of the writing. I was under pressure to publish this supplement in the mainstream journal. I was obliged to write to the BASO representative to say that:

“we cannot justify giving over a whole standard issue to the BASO Breast Guidelines at no charge when our manuscript flow and backlog is going up, and given that we have a wide geographic and multidisciplinary readership, and because of Impact Factor considerations.

On the scientific side, the professional and legal responsibility (for the Guidelines) lies with the writing committee. However, I would point out the importance that every ex cathedra statement (of opinion in the Guidelines) is supported by a clear statement of the level of evidence...This is a particular problem with the Oncoplastic guidelines, where opinion is strong but the evidence base is weak.... The “Guidelines about Guidelines” which is published by NICE are as good guidance as any for authors and editors.” (Rew 2004b)

The strategy which I had set out was demonstrably bearing fruit through 2004.

My Editor's Report for 2004

In my end of year editor's review, I was able to write that:

2004 has been another successful year for your journal. The impact factor has leapt from 1.39 to 1.86, which is very significant for a specialist society journal. The impact factor is an imperfect measure of quality in scientific writing, but it testifies to a growing worldwide readership and to the interest and originality in the writing of our authors.

We are nevertheless well aware of the importance which many authors are obliged to place upon the impact factor in their choice of medium for publication. We will thus continue to invest heavily in the quality and clarity of the written word on our pages, as the soundest way to attract new papers, readers and citations.

Electronic Distribution

The rise in the impact factor testifies in particular to the success of our electronic distribution strategy.... The journal is now primarily a vehicle of electronic distribution of knowledge in the surgical sciences, although it will continue to be founded on printed and archivable copy.

We recorded some 30,000 full article downloads across the internet in 2003, and many more visitors are browsing our contents and abstracts... We will continue to refine our Internet strategy and utility. For example, all back issues of the Journal will eventually be available to Science Direct subscribers and EJSO readers."

I also addressed the issue of Manuscript Quality. I wrote that:

"... Authors who have worked with us will understand the process of refinement of manuscripts by which we seek to produce concise, readable papers which focus on the key messages, and which are shorn of excessive wordiness, data and speculation.

For our readers, we recognise the demands of time and effort to absorb information in a world in which we are flooded with printed and electronic words and data on a daily basis. The short, punchy article will always succeed over the verbose and poorly presented tome in catching the attention and communicating the message within.

For our authors... we always seek reasons to publish and routes to improve manuscripts, often at considerable effort, rather than easy routes to rejection.... Our growing use of electronic systems in the production process, including e-mail communication with reviewers and authors, speeds up the production process considerably.

For our subscribers, we seek to give value for money, both in the quality of our product in a competitive professional marketplace, and in the utility of our presentation, particularly using our presence on the Internet and the resources of our publishers.

Peer Review: *Our reviewers and the anonymous peer review process continue to underpin the quality of the journal.... We use a wide range of new and established reviewers in assisting the editorial decision making process, and are most grateful to all those who respond promptly and efficiently to our requests... We also seek to develop weaker manuscripts with the authors' help before sending them out to review.*

Publication Fraud: *We are particularly grateful to all our readers and reviewers for vigilance against publication fraud, which takes insidious forms and from which no journal is immune. The EJSO subscribes to the values and resources of the independent Committee On Publication Ethics COPE).*

Editorial Philosophy: *The editorship of a major and authoritative professional journal confers privileges and challenges in meeting the demands and expectations of a diverse and influential professional community.*

The philosophy encompasses the preparation of a concise, readable and usable journal of record in the areas of clinical practice and scientific endeavour as set out in our aims and scope, using the English language as a clear medium of communication for the worldwide community. The direction is set for the journal to become the first choice for authors and readers in the many and fascinating disciplines of cancer surgery".(Rew 2005)

At the end of 2004, we were receiving enough good quality copy comfortably to publish 10 issues of the journal annually, and we had recorded more than 70,000 full article downloads over the year.

The EJSO in 2005

Peter Harrison was succeeded in post in early 2005 by Sarah Jenkins, who subsequently juggled the different interests of BASO and ESSO, and the diverse opinions around the direction of the journal through three editorships with considerable skill. Sarah and I first met in Kidlington on 11th March 2005. We reviewed the renewal of the tripartite publishing contract between BASO, ESSO and Elsevier. We also discussed the forthcoming launch of the Editorial Elsevier System, EES. Abi Robinson took on the editorial assistant role with day to day oversight of the article production process.

In April 2005, I circulated a discussion paper to make the case for changing the name of the journal to The Journal of Cancer Surgery. By the mid 2000s, “Surgical Oncology” was fading as a discipline in the UK. The responsibilities for the specialist cancer surgical disciplines in colorectal, breast, hepatobiliary, head and neck and other cancer types were being redistributed to the specialist societies and associations. Indeed, we were concerned in the UK that it might be difficult to sustain BASO as an independent society following the developing autonomy of the BASO Breast Group as the Association for Breast Surgery (ABS).

I felt that the name change to The Journal of Cancer Surgery might have a number of long term advantages at the cost of initial disruption, and given the need to register the new title with the Institute for scientific Information. If adopted, the change would:

- distinguish the journal from a number of other “surgical oncology” journals;
- improve the public understanding of our headline mission;
- move the journal on from a regional to a global title.

I noted that we had already successfully run the name as a subtitle on the journal masthead, and that BASO had adopted the working title “The Association for Cancer Surgery” on my initiative in the role of National Secretary of BASO from 2000 to 2002.

The transient threat of a name change to the Impact Factor gave rise to particular concern, as was loyalty to the “European” element of the title. It was clear that our European colleagues in ESSO were wedded to the enduring concept of Surgical Oncology, and strong views were expressed to me in the matter of the sanctity of the original name of the journal. We did not pursue the matter further.

The Editorial Board met for the annual meeting on Sunday 30th October 2005 at the Palais des Congres de Paris. Among the highlights:

- The Impact Factor had increased to 1.9 by the end of 2004;
- There had been a “massive” increase in institutional (University) on-line subscriptions, thus democratising access to the journal for a global readership of students and researchers;
- There had been a substantial increase in full text article downloads through Science Direct, thus evidencing a growth in the “serious readership” of the journal.
- There had been a significant uplift in online usage from North American institutions, which our publishing team attributed to a significant degree to my strategy of targeting North American reviewers.
- The journal homepage was live at intl.elsevierhealth.com/journals/ejso and was receiving an average of 45 visits per day.

Through 2004, we had published 177 articles across 1146 printed pages, with a 3.7 month turn around time from submission to acceptance. We had also published one sponsored supplement for the BASO Breast Group on the “Guidelines for the Management of Symptomatic Breast Disease”, along with a Special Issue which was edited by Cornelis van de Velde and Koen Peters from Amsterdam on the subject of “Quality Assurance in Surgical Oncology”. We were also scoring well against competitor journals on the Elsevier Author Feedback Programme.

I was keen to broaden the coverage of the cancer surgical specialities, and Mr Sean Kehoe, Consultant Gynaecologist in Oxford, was commissioned to guest edit a special issue of Gynaecological Oncology in his specialist field.

We were making more efficient use of the space in the journal, but were still confident to increase the page budget to 1320 pages for 2006 with a new article layout and more “readable” font.

My Editor's Review for 2005

At the end of 2005, I was able to state in my summary Editorial that:

2005 saw another year of significant progress for the EJSO... In terms of our international vision, we have moved away from the regionalism implicit in our original title with the adoption by Thomson Scientific of the acronym EJSO for the calculation of our Impact Factor for 2005 onwards. We have also adopted the byline "The Journal of Cancer Surgery" as a clear descriptor of our purpose for those less familiar with the arcane technocracy of "Surgical Oncology".

Globalisation of content: *Many of our manuscripts are now sourced from outside Europe... including China, Korea, Japan and Taiwan.*

Gynaecological Oncology: *We are also pleased to have broadened the subspeciality coverage of the Journal in areas of clinical practice such as Gynaecological Oncology, and in general interest areas such as Quality Assurance and Best Practice Guidelines, as witnessed by various of our special issues and supplements.*

The Impact of the Internet: *The Internet has brought the most dramatic gains to the Journal, whose content is now accessible world wide, and to huge numbers of academic users through Elsevier's ScienceDirect Portal. This allows institutional users access to whole article downloads, of which there were some 105,000 in 2005, up from 70,000 the previous year....*

Publication Fraud: *One of the more onerous aspects of Journal Editorship is the moral responsibility to help police the world scientific literature for publication fraud, which can range from the trivial to the criminally irresponsible. We are dependent upon our reviewers and readers to identify fraud, but are hugely helped in the duplicate publication and other forms of fraud by the power of modern search engines, which allow rapid and convenient cross checking of all the output of each and every author who submits to us.*

The EJSO is not immune to efforts at fraud, and a few particularly egregious examples have come to light in the recent past. Editors and publishers have limited powers in these matters and our sanctions are generally restricted to exposure and publicity. The ripples of fraud

cases spread out, and damage the reputations of host institutions and national professional bodies. It is up to the local bodies and organisations to act and to be seen to act vigorously in these cases, not least to protect the reputations of the majority of honest and conscientious researchers around them. We have been vigorous in alerting the relevant parties of our concerns, and will continue to be so.

Introduction of the Elsevier Editorial System: *Technology has also allowed us to modernise our own systems. The Elsevier Editorial System allows for substantial digitisation of the publication process, including online submission, review and editing of submitted manuscripts. ...Teething troubles and glitches have come to light, and we apologise to those of our reviewers and authors who have come across them.*

Maintaining the Quality of Content: *There remain many aspects of the publication process, which cannot satisfactorily be replicated by software. The written word is a tool of communication by people for people, and the formal processes of editing and peer review in journal production introduce an independent third party adjudication into this communication, which in turn add quality, judgement and expertise to the publication process. ..."*

I concluded that: "Human anatomy, physiology and surgical best practice are unchanging, but technology and the human mind throw up new opportunities for creative thinking and new ways of looking at our professional universe. We hope that we will in consequence be the first port of call for the best and most interesting writing and original clinical science that cancer surgery has to offer through 2006 and beyond (Rew 2006).

Development of the EJSO in 2006

On 11th May 2006, we held a meeting of the Associate Editors in Kidlington, to discuss the long term strategy and to maximise the profitability of the journal. Our full text downloads had increased to 114,500 during 2005, and we now had 2555 institutional subscribers (through Science Direct) alongside our 1600 society and personal subscribers. In August 2006, we published a special issue on the rare but challenging problem of Peritoneal Surface Malignancy, guest edited by Paul Sugarbaker of the Medstar Washington Cancer Centre.

The Editorial Board next met at the Palazzo del Casino in Venice on the 29th November 2006.

- The journal had turned a profit of £126K on sales of £256K
- The Impact Factor for 2005 had reached 2.05. However, the move to adopt “EJSO” as the full journal title had led ISI to calculate two Impact Factors for 2005. The Impact Factor for the full title was 3.18, while the IF for “EJSO” was 1.0. The clumsy mechanism of the hybrid calculation therefore reduced the apparent IF, while the reality was that the cumulative citation activity of the journal was increasing substantially.
- Manuscript submissions were now steady at 600 per year and the income from on line circulation was increasing.
- The geographic distribution of online usage was of particular interest. Only 9% was for the UK and 30% was European. 26% was North American and 20% was Asian.
- There were some 130,000 full article downloads over the year.

The dramatic uplift in the fortunes of the journal were now seemingly well embedded. I had one year of my initial five year contract still to run. At the Editorial Board meeting on the first December 2006, I was therefore pleased to note and to be able to accommodate the ambitions of a number of the ESSO-affiliated members to partake in the growing and substantial Editorial workload.

With longer term succession planning in mind, it was important to seek out and to develop the particular skills which would central to sustaining and nourishing rate of expansion. I was also well aware that after five decades under the Editorship of four successive British Editors, there was a determination to make a non-competitive ESSO-directed appointment. The ESSO members were particularly keen to advance the journal as a vehicle of educational content rather than purely of original clinical science, and there was a proposal to hold Associate Editorial Board meetings at the Federation of European Cancer Society (FECS) offices in Brussels rather than on the publisher’s premises or in rotation with the BASO UK headquarters venue at the Royal College of Surgeons in London.

A compromise was agreed on five suitable nominees for expanded roles as Associate Editors, and for maintenance of the status quo in terms of the operational arrangements for the publisher.

I was increasingly concerned at the evidence and growth in flagrant Publication Fraud and Malpractice, examples of which crossed my desk/screen in many different forms. One particularly egregious example came to light through an astute and diligent reviewer, who recognised that an article from a reputable journal that had ceased publishing a decade previously, had been resubmitted by the miscreants, word for word copied from the original, other than for a new list of authors.

This deceit was exercised on the erroneous assumption of the fraudsters that their ruse would not be detected. However, our response was constrained to refusing to publish the manuscript, and it seems quite likely that the same “crime” of fraudulent duplication was played out at other times on other journals without redress.

My Editor’s Report for 2006

In my 2006 end of year report, I discussed the management of the expansion of the journal, citing reasons for our success as including:

- Our partnership with the team at Elsevier, and the Science Direct Internet portal.
- Our strategy to create a multidisciplinary specialty journal with worldwide projection.
- The generous support of our successive chairmen, Professors Joop van Dongen and Niall O’Higgins, and of all the editorial and specialty board members, for my programme of modernisation and experimentation.
- Our drive for the quality, clarity and succinct focus of scientific writing;
- Our rigorous guidelines for concise, focussed writing.
- The importance of precision in the Use of Language
- Our measured move to parallel online publishing, and the virtues of the printed version. - -
- The malign impact of the Impact Factor
- Our duty to protect and sustain the quality of the world’s scientific literature, and the lack the tools to enforce action against publication fraud;
- and our appreciation of the Elsevier production team and technical support staff.

Development of the EJSO in 2007

The Associate Editors held telephone conference calls on 20th March and 12th June 2007. In the first quarter alone of 2007, 250 manuscripts of steadily and visibly improving quality were submitted. Any complacency that we may have felt about a steady state of manuscript flow had been dispelled. I implemented a limitation on manuscript length to 3000 words and five figures and tables to make best use of our page budget.

The Board next met in person at the ESSO Congress in Barcelona on the 23rd September 2007. The Impact Factor for 2006 was calculated at 1.9, with 535 citations from 339 articles in 2003-2004. 114,500 full article downloads were recorded for 2006 from Science Direct, with further increase noted in the first half of 2007. In December 2007, we published a special issue on the management of advanced colorectal cancer which was edited by Graeme Poston.

My Editor's Report for 2007

At the five year point of my editorship at the end of 2007, I was able to review the expansion and bibliometric progress of the journal, and to reflect on the beneficial impact of our digital strategy and various other operational changes. However, I remained concerned at the poor quality of writing and presentation of many of our received manuscripts, and the practical and educational work that was needed to address this problem. I also addressed:

- The Change of Chairmanship of the EJSO Board, with the retirement of Professor Niall O'Higgins and his succession by Professor Irving Taylor;
- The significance of the downloading of almost 200,000 full articles in 2007;
- The full adoption of the Internet enabled Elsevier Editorial System, including access for the editors to PubMed and Scopus. This allowed us to identify new reviewers and to cross-check the submission against the world literature so as to identify malpractice;
- new fonts and presentation formats for the journal;
- Expansion of the review panel;
- Our broader subject coverage of gynaecological oncology and other cancer specialities
- Our new Associate Editors and a refresh of the Editorial Advisory Board;
- a continual rise in the quality of our published manuscripts, and a large rise in our manuscript flow with an increase of our publication rate to 12 monthly issues.

In the Matter of the Quality of Scientific Writing in the Journal

I noted that there was much room for improvement. I wrote that:

There is still a danger that the Age of Digital Obfuscation will succeed the past Age of Enlightenment. One obstacle to effective communication in the surgical sciences is that of a widespread culture of inflation of words and data under the false assumption that this increases credibility....

Word inflation is often associated with imprecision and vagueness in the use of language and thought, the use of cliché'd words and phrases, and the drawing of loose- or open-ended conclusions which are not supported by the evidence to hand.

A clear hypothesis is the sine qua non of a good scientific paper, and yet many studies are written up on the basis of data trawling, tangential findings and statistical epiphenomena and without critical evaluation of the results and of sources of error (Rew 2008).

The Renewal of my Editorial Contract for 2008-2009

My initial five year term of office as Editor in Chief of the EJSO was scheduled to end in December 2007. I was grateful to Sarah Jenkins and to the Boards of BASO and ESSO for the invitation to extend my Editorship of the journal for a further two years. I noted in my formal letter of acceptance that:

"In managing such a demanding pace of expansion and high standards, I am of course aware that it is not possible to please everyone all of the time, or to meet all of the demands of the competing and different cultures in BASO and ESSO. Nevertheless, by relentless focus on the quality of the Journal and the long term strategic plan, I am led to believe that the general level of satisfaction among our subscribers, readers and authors is high.

Over the next two years, I intend that this progress should continue as we consolidate around 12 issues annually and explore new ways both of advancing the impact factor and in producing an informative, readable printed version of the Journal which our subscribers will feel able to continue to support and to take pride in. I also look forward to seeing a smooth succession to a capable successor whom I hope that you would seek to appoint through open and healthy competition, and to handing over a thriving Journal."

Development of the EJSO in 2008

For the first two months of 2008, I was post to Camp Bastion Hospital in Helmand in Afghanistan for a professionally absorbing clinical tour in support of the UK Defence Medical Services. The move of the journal to EES allowed me to continue to attend to my editorial duties as operational circumstances and the intermittency of the secure Defence satellite internet connection permitted.

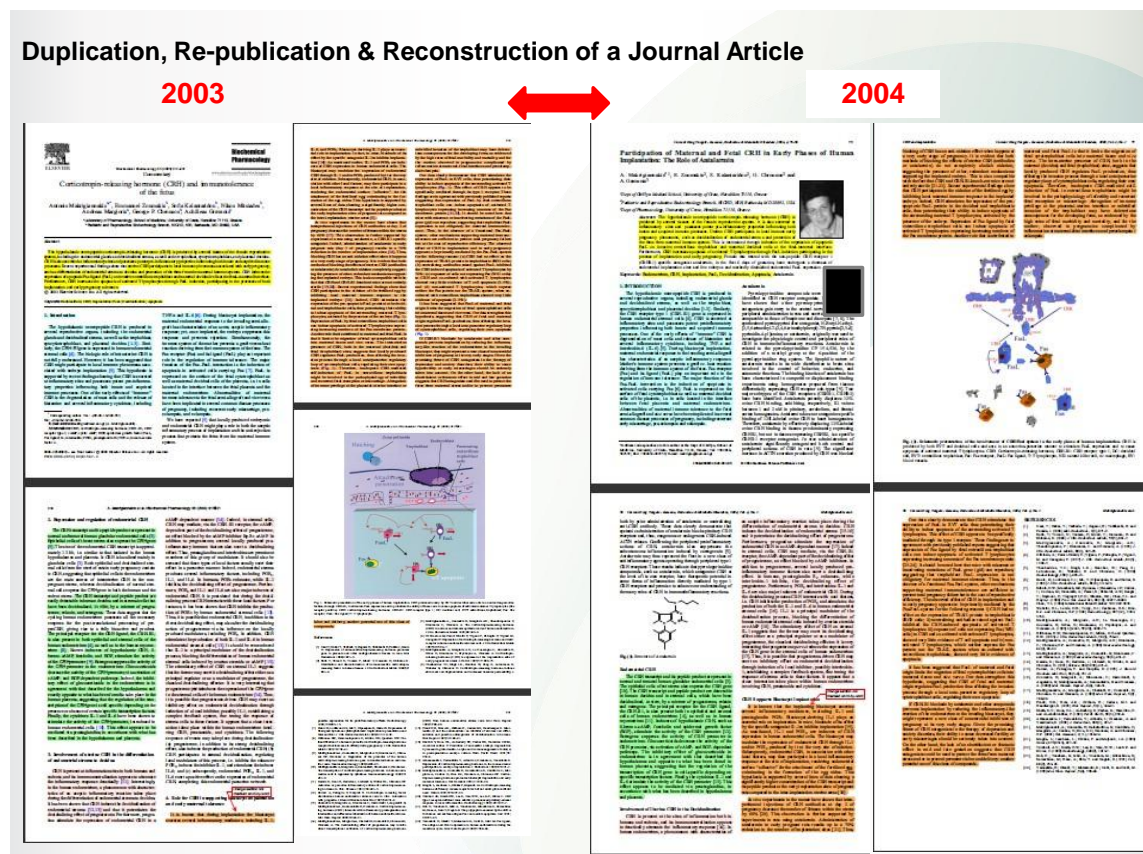


Figure 1. A visual representation of an exemplar of text duplication from the Deja Vu database. The article was submitted to two different journals on the subject of foetal corticotrophin. Despite modifications to the title and the figure, there was sufficient similarity in the text to persuade any reasonable reviewer that this was an exercise in intentional duplication (slide from a talk by the author to an audience of an Elsevier Publishing Connect webinar)

In the matter of publication fraud, we were contacted by Professor Harold Garner from the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Centre, whose team ran the text similarity search engine eTBLAST, across a large body of academic papers in Medline and discovered a

disturbing frequency of wilful duplication, which they made available for public review in the Deja Vu database of comparative texts. They highlighted three such articles that were associated with the EJSO and that had been demonstrably plagiarised from older journals (Figure 1). The project was subsequently published (Errami et al 2008, Garcia-Romero 2014).

This was an early exemplar of the utility of such forensic electronic data systems, which have subsequently evolved into commercial products such as Turnitin and iThenticate.

The Editorial Board next met on 10th September 2008 in Den Haag in the Netherlands.

- The income from electronic subscriptions now matched our subscription income.
- The Impact Factor for 2007 had increased to 2.1.
- The journal had moved to monthly publication for the first time
- Our Author Feedback Programme had scored 100% for the total publishing experience.
- In April 2008, we had published a Special Issue on Hepato-Pancreatico-Biliary surgery, which was also edited by Graeme Poston.

My Editor's Report for 2008

In my report at the end of 2008, I noted (Ref) that:

"Our strategy of focussing relentlessly on the quality of content, of writing and of presentation has lifted our impact factor above 2.0, and has secured us an Internet enabled download volume approaching 200,000 full articles in the past 12 months..."

I opined again on the need for originality in surgical writing, stating:

In the late 1980s, the US historian Francis Fukuyama coined the phrase "the end of history", just before history became interesting again. It would be a brave or foolhardy individual who forecast that everything to be known is now known in surgical oncology. Nevertheless, there is a danger that the world literature in cancer surgery will become saturated and endlessly repetitive if specialist journals of reference act merely as passive repositories of endlessly similar and competently presented data....

In reading back through the specialist surgical literature of the 19th and 20th century, we can see waves of change in style and approach to writing up clinical experience, through

case reports; anecdotal and descriptive case series; the introduction of the standard IMRAD format for original articles; increasing statistical rigour, spilling over into the abuse of the analytical power and churn over capacity of computers to produce obfuscating pseudoscience.

The era of the single surgeon/single unit case series has now largely run its course, but the era of the technology-enabled multi-centric high volume collaborative study is in its infancy. The technologies of the Internet, of data warehousing and data mining, linked to modern algorithms and systems of data capture, analysis and presentation, allow large studies or “all comer” analyses with huge statistical power to be performed with relative ease.

I noted also that:

There are great gaps in our knowledge as to what happens in the real world of treatment. Much of our insight is derived from highly selected patient populations in clinical trials or of components of therapy which do not describe or interpret the global contribution of treatments (for example surgery, chemotherapy and radiotherapy) to long term outcomes in the entire population. With the professional and political will to link data sets from many centres, a new approach to analysis will emerge, where the local case series gives way to much larger and more informative collaborative studies”(Rew 2009a).

Developments with the EJSO in 2009

My last Editorial Board Meeting was held at the International Convention Centre in Berlin on 22nd September 2009.

- The annual manuscript submission rate had averaged around 650 documents per annum over the past three years.
- Rejection rates were running at around 65%, as a surrogate indicator of editorial rigour.
- The annual page budget was 1440 pages ((12 x 120 pages).

We had a healthy mix of subjects in the manuscript, which I juggled to ensure a balanced mix of specialities (eg breast, hepatobiliary, Upper and lower gastrointestinal) in each issue. The expansion of the journal had created a delay of around 9 months from acceptance of a paper to print publication. However, this was now being offset by online publication of

manuscripts within six weeks of acceptance of the final versions. All such articles could be cited using their unique digital object identifies numbers, and all were also made available through PubMed.

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We were enjoying around 3,735 institutional subscriptions to ScienceDirect, of which 27% were sourced from the USA, so our authors had direct access to the screens of huge numbers of students, early career researchers and academically orientated health care professionals. The pattern of decline in print-only subscriptions from individual society members was clear. We had recorded 224,393 full article downloads through 2008, which was further testimony to our evolving digital strategy. Our impact factor for 2008 was calculated at an all time high for the EJSO at 2.49, with accrued 1089 citations in (2006 + 2007).

My Concluding Editorial at the End of 2009

I was therefore pleased to be able to report in my final Editorial at the end of 2009 that the EJSO was in excellent shape. I summarised my time in office as follows (Ref):

“Since its origins in the mid-1970s, the journal has progressed from a small regional subspeciality journal with a negligible Impact Factor to an Internet enabled, broadly based multi-disciplinary journal with an IF of around 2.5; a manuscript flow of around 600 per annum; an increase in publication frequency from 6 to 12 per year; a healthy rejection rate and list of manuscripts awaiting publication; and a logged full article download of some 300,000 items annually. In the past year alone, the IF has risen from 2.0 to 2.5, and this trend should continue on the basis of foundations already laid by the Editorial Team.

Most importantly of all, the quality and readability have been driven up continually, with firm guidelines and strict standards of writing and presentation, accuracy, focus and precis in scientific English. Your journal now stands fair comparison in fraternal worldwide competition with the largest and longest established US based journals in the cancer surgical disciplines...

The Impact of the Internet, 2003-2009: *The Internet has provided one of the great intellectual challenges and opportunities of the Age of Electronic Enlightenment. We have*

adapted quickly and successfully to the changes, and have morphed into a product of the Internet age. There is a vigorous and continuing debate as to the purpose of a printed journal when so much information is now available on line.

We continue to believe that act of producing a printed journal remains the best guarantee of quality and the driver of the core disciplines in scientific publishing. However, we also recognise the paradox that many of our downloading readers, whose subscriptions to Science Direct bring us indirect revenues, will never see the printed issue.

Peer review: *A scientific journal exists for and is underpinned by a community of specialists. Peer review serves a number of important purposes. It spreads the burden of expert insight and decision making on those manuscripts which cross the basic quality threshold for consideration for publication, and it broadens the engagement of individuals within the specialist community.*

By offering out manuscripts to a wide range of reviewers across the world, and by using software tools to identify the most relevant reviewers for any given manuscript, we have been able to develop interest and support for the EJSO, and to create new sources of manuscripts and communities of readers.

Publication fraud: *Publication in a peer reviewed journal has such importance to the careers of individuals that some are driven to the most willfully fraudulent and devious acts to secure public recognition. The EJSO has seen its share of such misbehaviour in recent years, with discovery through specialist software tools and through the vigilance, knowledge and suspicion of our reviewers. Sometimes, sheer luck plays a part, as when one of our North American reviewers recognised the text of his own paper in a submission from the Far East.*

The role of the Journal in advancing Clinical Practice

A Journal is more than a passive repository of audit papers. The Editor and the Editorial Board must set standards, direction, strategy, and provide the intellectual leadership which in turn help shape the professional landscape. We have set out to broaden the content of the journal into that of a true multi-disciplinary cancer surgical journal, through a number of

strategies. These have included the publication of sub-speciality issues, and the appointment of associate editors in Urological and Gynaecological Cancer. We have also published subject matter from the fields of clinical and medical oncology.

We have also sought to encourage the dissemination of knowledge in the basic, cell and molecular sciences related to surgical oncology. However, we have discouraged the unduly speculative and material of dubious clinical relevance, as is often the case with cell line, small mammal and other animal studies....

The journal is now demonstrably worldwide in its reach, readership and authorship, and it is my personal view that the term “European” in our historic title no longer fully or accurately describes our scope and purpose. I believe in our long-term future as “The Journal of Cancer Surgery” both in spirit and name, and I commend this aspiration to my successors.

I hope that the present success of the EJSO will in some small way enrich and strengthen the professional practice of cancer surgeons, and help secure leverage in the relentless struggle for resources for our patients; and secure wider recognition of the rigorous academic discipline and evidence base which underpins our daily work” (Rew 2009a, b, c).

The Next Steps in my Academic Publishing Career

I sought to hand over the journal to my successor in the strongest possible condition. The ESSO Board imposed its nominee on the Journal as Editor but this proved unsatisfactory. Three years later, he was replaced. The journal has progressed steadily since 2013.

Over the final two years in post as Editor of the EJSO, I was offered two new appointments which further advanced my academic publishing career.

1. The Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) 2008-2010

In early 2008, Sarah Jenkins encouraged me to apply for a post on the Council of The Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE). COPE was founded in April 1997 as a voluntary body by a group of Journal Editors in and around London who were concerned at the growing evidence of publication fraud and malpractice from their personal experiences.

The first edition of the COPE Guidelines on Good Publication Practice were published in 1999. Regular meetings have been held and updated Codes of Conduct have since been published and are readily available on the COPE Website. COPE has since prospered as a global reference point for many issues and policies around ethical publishing.

See <https://publicationethics.org/about/what-we-do/our-story>

I served on the COPE Council for two years, from mid 2008 to mid 2010, during which time the first COPE Editor and Communications Director (Jeannie Wurtz) was appointed and the COPE Newsletter was established. My contributions to COPE were limited, as I was finding it difficult to take time out of my clinical commitments to attend COPE board meetings. I therefore stepped down from the COPE Council in 2010. However, my time on the COPE Council focussed my interests in the extent of the challenges of publication malpractice and in the establishment of effective codes of conduct in Publication Ethics, which were to serve me well in my next role (Rew 2010).

2. The Subject Chair for Medicine on the SCOPUS Content Selection and Advisory Board

Through Sarah Jenkins' further generous support, my work for the EJSO had come to wider attention of corporate Elsevier.

Elsevier were seeking an independent board of independent subject specialists with a proven track record in journal editing or librarianship to advise on quality assurance of the global academic literature.

In April 2009, I was invited to join the Content Selection Advisory Board (CSAB) of the SCOPUS citation and bibliometric system as the Subject Chair for Medicine. SCOPUS was a rapidly developing system in which Elsevier had invested huge sums of money in developing a direct competitor to the Web of Knowledge/Science, which was then owned by Thomson Scientific (ISI), which in turned owned the Impact Factor.

In Summary

The Editorship of a trustworthy academic journal is a great professional privilege and an influential exercise in responsible public service.

The Editor leads and is accountable to a large community of authors, reviewers editorial and publishing team members, working ultimately in the service of the general citizenry, and particularly of those whose lives may be directed impacted by the outputs of the journal.

Effective Editorship requires preparation, clear sightedness, purpose and a moral compass with which to navigate the many ambiguities and challenges of Publication Ethics and Malpractice, and other calls upon his or her judgement

Editorship carries a particular contributory responsibility to shaping the global corpus of knowledge and to the pursuit of excellence in the application of language and to the integrity of the scientific and knowledge creation processes.

I have found this unique, challenging and fascinating role over seven years in leading the development of the EJSO to have been a particularly fulfilling element of my subsequent professional career, in which I was able to build on my rich experience to great effect.

I will discuss my experience and the lessons learned from my work over the following 16 years (to date) on the SCOPUS Content Advisory board in following essays in this series.

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