
From the editor

Into the next millenium at the “one stop shopping guide” for tobacco control

After working as Ron Davis' deputy for the past seven years, I'm honoured and excited to have accepted the editor's post now that Ron has moved on to become North American editor for the *British Medical Journal*. All who have followed the progress of *Tobacco Control* since its launch in 1992 will know what a unique journal it has become under his leadership. From its often riveting covers, through its solid stock of original articles and to its compelling blend of news analysis and advocacy studies, the journal is—as an industry conference was advised from our very first year—“an unlimited source of information” which the delegates were advised emphatically to “READ and READ again”.¹ I believe the journal's strengths centre around our recognition that the tobacco control field requires research and advocacy talent from a very diverse range of disciplines and experiences. We will continue to actively facilitate the publication of high-quality research and scholarship from this diverse field and make particular efforts to encourage papers from multidisciplinary groups.

There are some profound challenges facing our field in the new millenium. The following five particularly interest me.

- What advocacy strategies and ways of framing tobacco control issues will have most impact on the governments and populations of less developed countries where progress against tobacco is mostly in its infancy, and both population size and tobacco use is rising rapidly?
- How can we better encourage research scholarship into the advocacy process?
- Several nations with robust tobacco control programmes have seen (particularly male) smoking prevalence fall continually over the past 30 years, only to stall around 20–25% during the 1990s. Will it be possible to get and keep smoking prevalence below 20%, particularly in nations where regulations and programmes have already gone a long way towards the “gold standards” of comprehensive tobacco control policies such as those described by the World Health Organisation.
- What insights can qualitative methods bring to the goal of rejuvenating these stalled declines?
- How will the harm reduction debate in tobacco control develop?

The electronic age

Throughout the affluent Western world, university libraries are cutting subscriptions, particularly to specialised, low-circulation, high-cost journals. A recent article in *Nature* argued persuasively that “a journal without a web version is now rare, and probably endangered”.² Reed-Elsevier has more than 1200 journals online, with Springer having 360 and Academic Press 174. Seven of the BMJ Publishing Group's specialist journals, as well as the *BMJ*, are fully online. By mid-year all BMJ Publishing Group journals, including *Tobacco Control*, will be available full text online, via one or more aggregators such as OCLC, BIDS, and OVID. These aggregator sites are only

available if your institutional library subscribes to one or more of these services and has a print subscription.

In March, we received news that following a proposal prepared by Ron Davis and our deputy editor Mike Cummings, the Robert Woods Johnson Foundation had approved a substantial grant to the journal. The grant, which runs for three years, will assist us in our marketing, in maintaining the colour illustrations that have become a journal trademark, in increasing the number of pages per issue, and in going fully online later this year.

Two options are available here. Like the *BMJ*, we could go full text online so that anyone, regardless of whether they subscribe, could read the entire contents of *Tobacco Control*. If this option strikes you as a commercial death wish (wouldn't many subscribers not renew their subscription if they could get it free online?) this has so far *not* been the *BMJ*'s experience. If anything, providing full text online appears so far to have acted as a marketing tool. Alternatively, we could provide all abstracts free to anyone, but allow password-accessible access to full text to our subscribers only. The editorial board will be considering these options in the next months.

Submission of manuscripts

Another electronic development concerns submission and manuscript handling. From this issue onward, we will be standarisng the use of email to receive manuscripts, distribute them for review, and correspond with authors. Whenever possible, all submissions should be sent by email as attachments in Word, WordPerfect or rich text format (RTF). It would assist us if authors could send submissions as one file. Hard copy submissions are not generally required except for figures, photographs, and illustrations that may be problematic to transfer electronically. In the first 14 weeks of 1999, we have received 42 submissions—including 37 original articles. All of these have successfully been processed electronically with only the occasional minor problem.

Tobacco Control is a quarterly publication and at present does not have enough subscribers to warrant going bi-monthly or monthly, if we were to hold the subscription costs within our estimates of what the market would bear. We typically publish eight original articles per issue—a mere 32 a year. If this year's rate of submissions continues and we increase the average number of original articles per issue to 12, this will mean that we will have a rejection rate of 65%.

One of the most common reasons for rejection is that papers are judged by the editors as being of too little interest to an international readership. Typical instances of these are papers with titles such as “Smoking beliefs of junior high school students (or minority group X) in city Z” or “An evaluation of hospital Y's smoking cessation programme”. Such papers are often of high methodological quality, and although they may be of some interest to local health workers in their countries of origin, are likely

to reduce the impact factor of an international journal—being seldom if ever cited by others.

These concerns, together with the potential provided by electronic publication, raise the possibility that we might offer some authors the chance to be published in full on our web site, but only have their abstracts published in the hard copy of the journal. Such papers would go through full peer review and may well, as the future of electronic publishing develops, be seen as falling only little short of full publication status.

I and the other senior editors would value authors' thoughts on the acceptability of such a proposal.

SIMON CHAPMAN

Editor

- 1 Donck P. Our opponents. Presentation to INMAC Conference, Amsterdam, 12–15 October 1992. Minnesota resolution document at Philip Morris site <www.pmdocs.com>. Document number: 2024762718/2738.
- 2 Butler D. The writing is on the web for science journals in print. *Nature* 1999;397:195–200.



The Nicotine Institute within the Institute of Social Medicine at the University of Vienna, Austria, advertised a smoking cessation counselling and treatment service as part of a new year's resolution strategy at the end of 1998. In response, Ronson cigarette advertising appeared in Vienna bearing the slogan "Stronger than any New Year Resolution". (Photo credit: Ernest Groman, Michael Kunze, Ursula Kunze.)

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