

TOBACCO CONTROL

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL

Editorials

Two years of *Tobacco Control*: how are we doing?

Two years have passed since the launch of *Tobacco Control*. So it would seem appropriate to pause and take stock of how the journal has progressed during publication of its first eight issues. This review will help us measure the degree to which we have accomplished the goals we established for the journal before its inception.

A principal goal for *Tobacco Control*, as I stated in an editorial inaugurating the journal,¹ is to publish research articles that have undergone rigorous peer review. I also emphasised our aim to be international in scope.¹ So in this essay, I shall pay particular attention to the papers we have published, the papers that have been submitted to the journal, and their geographic distribution.

Readers are understandably interested in how efficiently journals process papers through peer and editorial review. Many journals routinely publish audits of their performance in reviewing and making decisions on manuscripts,^{2,3} and *Tobacco Control* will do the same, beginning with this editorial. I will also describe our peer review process, and report on the circulation of the journal.

Papers published

Forty-three research papers reporting original data were published in the first two volumes. The average number of these papers per issue increased from four in volume one to seven in volume two. These figures do not include a dozen or so articles which were analytic in nature but did not report new data; these papers appeared under such banners as Special Communication, Review Article, Commentary, and Industry Watch.

Of the 43 research papers mentioned above, 38 reported data from the following countries: US (21), Australia (5), UK (5), and one each from France, Italy, Sweden, Denmark, Japan, Argentina, and Bahrain. The other five papers each reported data from multiple countries.

Papers submitted

Up to 31 October 1993, 150 papers had been submitted to *Tobacco Control*. Of these, 51 (34%) were accepted (almost always after one or more revisions), 49 (33%) were rejected, 49 (33%) are pending (under editorial or peer review or undergoing revision) or are considered "inactive" (revised manuscript never returned by the authors), and one was withdrawn by the author.

Of the first 150 papers submitted, 117 (78%) were sent for outside review (ie, review beyond the editor and deputy editor). Of the 33 papers not sent for outside review, 27 were rejected, three were accepted, and three were returned to the author(s) with a request for revisions.

It took a median of 46 calendar days from manuscript receipt to rejection; 147 days (21 weeks) from receipt to acceptance; and 244 days (35 weeks) from receipt to publication*. Of the 27 manuscripts rejected without outside review, the median time from receipt to rejection was 21 days. The median time to make an initial decision

(need for revision, rejection, or acceptance) for all papers received up to 9 August 1993 (n = 130) was 67 days.

The first 150 manuscripts were submitted by authors from 28 different countries. One hundred and thirty-seven of the papers reported country- or region-specific data or information, with the following distribution: North America, 54 (including 52 pertaining to the US) (39%); Europe, 37 (including nine pertaining to the UK) (27%); the Western Pacific, 24 (including 10 pertaining to Australia) (18%); the Eastern Mediterranean, 5 (4%); Latin America, 4 (3%); South-East Asia, 3 (2%); and Africa, 2 (1%) (eight of the 137 papers reported information pertaining to countries from multiple regions).

Our peer review process

When a manuscript is submitted to *Tobacco Control*, I review its content and assign it to myself, to the deputy editor, or to one of 12 associate editors (listed on the inside front cover of the journal), who then take varying degrees of responsibility for overseeing the paper through our peer review process. The assigned editor reviews the paper and makes recommendations for peer reviewers. Most papers are sent to two outside reviewers (in addition to the associate editor), and this past year we began to send all research papers to a statistical reviewer for comment on statistical and methodological aspects of the studies.

When peer review comments are received, they are sent to the assigned editor, who then makes a recommendation to the editor regarding acceptance, rejection, or the need for revision. In some cases the associate editor corresponds directly with the author after consultation with the editor; in other cases, the associate editor provides input to the editor, who then communicates with the author.

When an author returns a revised manuscript to us, it is sent to the editor to whom the paper was originally assigned. The assigned editor makes a recommendation to the editor regarding acceptability of the paper.

We usually share peer review comments (with identifiers removed) and our letters to authors with the reviewers. This gives them feedback on editorial decisions regarding the paper and allows them to compare their own judgements of the paper with those of their peers.

Peer reviewers, of course, play a central role in this process. Like most journals, *Tobacco Control* does not provide financial compensation to peer reviewers. They spend many hours evaluating papers because they believe in the peer review process. Elsewhere in this issue (page 348), we recognise and express our gratitude to the 193 individuals who have assisted us in the review of manuscripts up to 31 October 1993.

* Calculated to the 15th day of the month of issue (March, June, September, or December).

Subscriptions

Subscriptions to *Tobacco Control* have grown steadily since the journal's launch. By the end of October 1993, the journal's circulation stood at 732. Paid subscriptions accounted for 92% (671) of this total.

Forty-five percent (332) of the subscriptions came from the US (295) and Canada (37). Europe accounted for 36% (266), including 139 from the UK, 82 from other Western European countries, 43 from Northern Europe, and two from Eastern Europe. Australia and Japan contributed 54 and 22 subscriptions, respectively, and 25 came from other countries in the Western Pacific. Smaller numbers came from Latin America (10), Africa (9), South-East Asia (7), and the Eastern Mediterranean (7).

Most of the subscriptions come from three sources: 1) health organisations and agencies, including government agencies, health charities, hospitals, pharmaceutical companies, and tobacco control organisations; 2) individual health care providers and tobacco control advocates; and 3) libraries. Back in the second issue, our deputy editor predicted that "that tobacco industry will be numbered among our most diligent and eager to learn readers".⁴ And indeed, at least 25 subscriptions come from tobacco companies, their research arms and law firms.

Comment

The publisher and editors are pleased with the progress that *Tobacco Control* has achieved since its launch two years ago. We believe we have made many strides toward accomplishing the goals we established for the journal at its outset. We have published a growing number of scientific articles that are relevant to the prevention and control of tobacco use. We have also published two special supplements pertaining to tobacco policy research⁵ and smoking cessation.⁶

Thirty-one (72%) of the 43 research articles we have published reported data from one of three countries: the US, the UK, or Australia. We hope to achieve a more diverse international mix of articles in the future, and we are moving in that direction. For countries or regions from which we receive few research papers, we make a special effort to provide coverage in other sections of the journal (eg, News Analysis, Ad Watch, letters to the editor, and the covers and cover essays).

Above I provided some figures on the length of time manuscripts are typically under review at *Tobacco Control* before editorial decisions are made. Although our response times compare favourably with those of many other journals, we will strive to improve upon them in the months and years to come. Nevertheless, contributors should be aware that the international scope of the journal's operation – with editors, contributors, and peer reviewers in different regions of the world – hinders our efforts to hasten the movement of manuscripts through our peer review process.

At the first meeting of the journal's editorial advisory board at the 8th World Conference on Tobacco or Health in 1992, I articulated another key goal for *Tobacco Control*: to make this journal eminently readable, interesting, provocative at times, and even entertaining. To that end, we use more photographs and other illustrations than do most other journals, we publish cartoons, we use fillers to take up the empty space on pages, and we take biting and humorous looks at the tobacco industry and its allies. Compared with the dry, staid journals that predominate in the biomedical literature, *Tobacco Control* might even be considered avant-garde.

The rich diversity of material published in *Tobacco*

Control is intended not only to make the journal more readable, but also to allow it to appeal to a diverse audience. We would like to have subscribers from all walks of tobacco control: researchers, health care providers, educators, policy-makers, tobacco control activists, and so on. Scientists who read the journal's medley of information will better appreciate what is happening in the trenches of tobacco control. Non-scientists who read the journal will be exposed to relevant research that will aid their front-line efforts to reduce tobacco use. And to acknowledge fiscal realities, a new journal must appeal to a broad readership if it hopes to become economically viable.

At times we have had to work particularly hard at soliciting contributions to Ad Watch, Industry Watch, Speaking Personally, and News Analysis. People who write for scientific journals may be less alert to the possibility of contributing such material than advocates and community health workers, who in turn tend to plead "too busy campaigning" to set aside time to document their thoughts and observations. I put out a special call for contributions to these important sections of the journal. I also solicit contributions for use as fillers, such as photographs, tobacco ads, and artwork; those who contribute fillers should supply appropriate captions, and will be acknowledged alongside published fillers.

Much of the non-scientific portion of the journal deals with the tobacco industry and its marketing activities. That may seem unusual for a scientific journal, but it is not altogether unique. The journal *Addiction*, for example, recently carried an interesting series of commentaries on the alcohol beverage industry.⁷⁻⁹

Tobacco control is similar to other areas of medicine and public health where powerful vested interests stand in the way of health and long life. Test tubes and computers can only take us so far. Eventually, all of us, including scientists, must explore the environment in which unhealthy behaviours are promoted and adopted. Obviously the tobacco industry is a key actor in that environment, and the elimination of tobacco-attributable disease will depend on our success in exposing and opposing the efforts of that industry.

In the title of this editorial, I posed the question, "How are we doing?" Our own assessment is positive. In addition, we seem to have struck a sensitive chord within the tobacco industry, which is always an important sign: *Tobacco Control* was hailed at an international industry conference as a symbol of the "coming of age" of the global tobacco control movement.¹⁰

The ultimate answer to my question, though, can only be provided by the readership. How *are* we doing, readers? Please send us your thoughts.

RONALD M DAVIS

Editor

- 1 Davis RM. The slow growth of a movement – and finally, a journal. *Tobacco Control* 1992; 1: 1-2.
- 2 BMJ publishes audit of decision making. *BMJ* 1993; 307: 223.
- 3 Williams ES, Lundberg GD. Information for readers: the *JAMA* 1992 editorial peer review audit. *JAMA* 1993; 269: 1296.
- 4 Chapman S. Upgrading the academic respectability of advocacy studies. *Tobacco Control* 1992; 1: 81-3.
- 5 Policy research: strategic directions. *Tobacco Control* 1992; 1 (suppl): S1-56.
- 6 Issues in smoking cessation: Who quits? Who pays? *Tobacco Control* 1993; 2 (suppl): S1-S88.
- 7 Wallack L. Warning: the alcohol industry is not your friend? *Br J Addict* 1992; 87: 1109-11.
- 8 Herbits SE, Rae J, Mitchell P, Daube M, Gerstein DR, Mosher JF, et al. Comments on Wallack's editorial "Warning: the alcohol industry is not your friend?" *Addiction* 1993; 88: 9-24.
- 9 Pittman DJ, Anderson P, Wallack L. Further comments on Wallack's editorial "Warning: the alcohol industry is not your friend?", and Wallack's reply. *Addiction* 1993; 88: 167-78.
- 10 Bloom J. Fear and irony on Tobacco Road: notes from the Fourth Tobacco International Exhibition and Conference. *Tobacco Control* 1993; 2: 46-9.