

Reflections on a decade of editing *Tobacco Control*

Ruth E Malone

This last issue of 2018 marks 10 years since I began service as editor-in-chief of *Tobacco Control*. Awed and excited to follow in the large footprints of former editor-in-chief Simon Chapman and, before that, founding editor Ron Davis, I could not then have imagined how quickly the decade would rush by. Supported by a tremendous team of senior editors and deputy editors, as well as a stellar editorial board and *BMJ* staff, the journal has thrived. Over the last decade, we marked 20 years of publication with a state-of-the-field anniversary issue, published numerous highly influential special supplements and remained the top policy-focused international journal in tobacco control circles. The following rather random ruminations on 10 years at the helm of this journal may perhaps thus be forgiven.

In 2008, *Tobacco Control* received 398 submissions. The number varies from year to year, but in 2017, about 550 manuscripts were submitted, and our high to date was in 2016, when over 700 submissions came in. Whew! This year, we are on track to receive well over 600 papers, perhaps more.

Social media were really just beginning to be a thing in 2009. Now @TC_BMJ has over 5000 Twitter followers. In 2008, many readers still accessed the journal via paper copies. Now, most readers access it online. Our website received over 1.6 million page views in 2017, and we now feature a range of additional content to help our wide variety of readers—scientists, advocates, policy-makers, health practitioners and the public—connect with the issues in our field and the research we publish. In 2008, we did not yet have podcasts, blogs and videos, coordinated by Marita Hefler and Becky Freeman, our news and social media editors.

In an initiative first begun in 2009 with a grant from the Bloomberg Foundation, and since institutionalised as a commitment by the editors, the journal has worked to encourage and support the work of authors from low-income

and middle-income countries. We receive papers from all over the world, but many are non-competitive for peer review when first received. Our small but dedicated pool of volunteer mentors has helped many authors from countries without strong academic publishing traditions move their most promising manuscripts forward to peer review and publication, or sometimes to another form of publication such as a news piece or blog post. In some cases, this mentorship has led to productive subsequent research collaborations. These efforts reaffirm our commitment to remember that publishing has social justice implications.^{1,2}

The work that was the impetus for starting a tobacco control journal decades ago continues, but the journal now is focused primarily on policy change, the most effective way to address the tobacco epidemic. Further, the worldwide movement is increasingly unafraid to call out and take on the tobacco industry, the most important obstacle to effective public health policies. In 2009, former News Editor David Simpson noted that “in glorious contrast to how things used to go at intergovernmental meetings on tobacco control in the past... genuine public health concerns dominated the latest meeting to set guidelines for implementing the World Health Organization’s Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC). At the third Conference of Parties (CoP3) held in Durban, South Africa in November, a strong pro-health consensus among the large majority of the 160 governments that have both signed and ratified the treaty—the ‘parties’—defeated efforts to weaken policy guidelines to accommodate tobacco interests.”³

It was during that CoP that guidelines for the implementation of Article 5.3, aimed at protecting tobacco control policy from tobacco industry interference, were agreed on. Let us hope that CoP8, which will have just concluded as this editorial goes to press, is equally successful in minimising the tobacco industry’s influence. Certainly, there is no indication that the industry and its allies are ready to stop trying to delay and derail strong public health policies. Instead, what tobacco companies clearly hope is that people will

forget who they really are and what they really did, and believe their oft-recycled claim that they have changed. Despite the fact that they continue hawking the most deadly consumer product ever made and do so as aggressively as governments will permit, they continue to lure the gormless with their lies.

Today, the tobacco control field remains robust, active, fraught with contention and fun. Who knew in 2008 that the hottest new products 10 years later would be nicotine delivery systems that looked like computer flash drives? Who could have predicted that the cigarette industry would find itself threatened by drops in smoking prevalence and the rise of an enormous range of non-smoked tobacco and nicotine products, to the point that cigarette companies feel they must say repeatedly that they really, really, really want to end smoking, they just need more time? Seems like more than 60 years would be enough.

To conclude, some predictions:

Within 10 years, 60 million people now alive will die from lethal tobacco products.

Within 10 years, some countries in the world (or states in the USA) will have begun a staged, systematic phaseout of the sale of commercial cigarettes and/or other tobacco products.

I know the first prediction is likely no matter what but I am betting on the second one, too. Let’s make the tobacco industry prove it is ready to end smoking.

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