

Editorial

Regular readers of the *Journal* will immediately be aware that the format of the current issue has changed in several subtle ways. Change is, of course, a pervasive influence in modern life to which we are all subject, but the present pace of change in medical practice seems often to bewilder. The present editorial is therefore designed to explain some of the changes that we have made to the *Journal*, and intend to make in the near future, in order to try and increase the quality of the material that we publish.

The change that will perhaps impact most immediately on contributors is a decision to adopt the Vancouver system of referencing articles. Many will regret this change but the Harvard system, in which authors are listed within the body of the text, has the disadvantage that it adds unnecessarily to the length of a paper. We also felt that such a move would serve to bring us into line with the majority of other medical journals. The current issue is therefore printed with articles that have been changed into the different format by our production staff, but we would ask that future manuscripts be submitted with references in the Vancouver style, as outlined in the Instructions for Authors.

Another major change that we intend to make concerns the questions of competing interests and ownership by authors of their work. Two years ago, when the Instructions for Authors were clarified, we decided to ask authors to send to us a covering letter listing the contributions to the paper of each author since it was sometimes difficult to understand how large numbers of co-authors could have contributed to a short paper or a case report. We also asked that contributors should make clear any real or potential competing interests and that one author should be a named guarantor, who would be answerable for the integrity of the manuscript. It has been difficult to enforce these requests and, indeed, the majority of manuscripts continue to arrive without any such information appended. Unfortunately, it is increasingly clear that fraud and misconduct occur in medical research,¹ although the magnitude of the problem in the literature as a whole is unknown since its detection has largely been serendipitous. However, we must presume that our own speciality is not immune from this problem. It is self-evident that poorly conducted research or dishonest claims about the safety of a surgical procedure or the efficacy of a diagnostic test will distort the evidence base of our speciality and may also, in extreme circumstances, adversely influence patients. As editors we have had no evidence of misconduct to date but we must, of course, guard against it. We are aware that no simple statement of probity can act as an absolute guarantee but we do intend to insist that authors identify

competing interests and that a named guarantor is provided when manuscripts are submitted. This information will then be published with the article.

It is also our intention to make the full text of the *Journal* available on the Internet as from the New Year, and we intend to offer this at no additional cost to existing paper subscribers. Since the launch of the *Journal of Laryngology & Otology* site, we have received a number of requests asking that we make available a full text version of the *Journal* in electronic format, and it is clear that this is the way in which medical publishing is progressing. The web site will also undergo some modification and will be linked to that of the Royal Society of Medicine, who are now acting as our publishers. We hope that these latter changes will prove popular and useful, as the electronic archive of information increases, to those engaged in research and study. Finally, it cannot have escaped anybody's attention that these changes coincide with the beginning of a new millennium. The *Journal* has evolved in many ways since it was founded over 110 years ago by Morrell Mackenzie and Norris Wolfenden but, as our historical archive series '100 Years Ago' frequently demonstrated, while much may appear to have altered, the diseases we treat remain the same and our fundamental understanding of their aetiology still remains in many instances obscure. Presumably, we all hope and would predict that this will also change although, as someone once said, 'Predictions are hard to make, especially about the future'. Whatever the new millennium holds, we hope that the *Journal* will continue to be a major vehicle for research in our speciality and that you will continue to enjoy reading it and contributing to it.

NEIL WEIR and GUY KENYON

Reference

- 1 Farthing MJG. The editors response to fraudsters. *BMJ* 1998;**316**:1726–33

Welcome from the new publishers

I am delighted to have this opportunity to welcome readers of the *Journal* to this first issue published by the Royal Society of Medicine Press, the publishing arm of the Royal Society of Medicine in London, UK.

We are very pleased to be associated with such an important and prestigious journal in the field of otolaryngology, especially as the Sections of Otology and Laryngology & Rhinology at the RSM are so active in the academic life of the speciality.

Editorial control of the journal remains firmly in the capable hands of Neil Weir, Guy Kenyon, the assistant editors and advisers. The high standards of production will continue to be maintained by Headley Brothers. Our job as the new publishers will be to bring our expertise to bear on the development of the journal at the turn of the millennium, looking in particular at the opportunities offered by the Internet for electronic dissemination.

From the beginning of this year, the full text of the *Journal* will be available on the web, at no extra cost for paper subscribers. This will be linked to the existing and successful website for the *Journal*, and

to the RSM's own web site. The web version will be fully searchable, and will offer links from article references to the relevant abstracts and, in some cases, to the full text. Subscribers will be able to register to receive the contents of each issue by email each month. Full details of how to access the web version of the *Journal* will be sent to subscribers in early 2000.

We look forward to a long and successful relationship with the *Journal of Laryngology & Otology*, its editors and its readers.

PETER RICHARDSON
Managing Director, RSM Press