

Editing a scientific journal in Croatia: the case of *Biochemia Medica*

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Seven years ago, I joined the editorial board of *Biochemia Medica*, the English-language, peer-reviewed journal of the Croatian Society of Medical Biochemists (CSMB). Its 16th anniversary coincided with a major re-design¹ when two co-editors in chief were appointed, and I was offered a post of an assistant editor.

Our editorial policy was to gain international recognition in the field of laboratory medicine. For a journal from a small scientific community, this recognition could be earned by adhering to internationally acceptable publishing standards and by satisfying the following main indexing criteria: clear and unique aims and scope; timely and regular publication; quality of the journal content; quality of the editorial work; technical quality of the journal; international editorial board; visibility for the international scientific community.² Members of our editorial team invested a lot to meet these standards and indexing criteria.

Aims and scope of the journal

New journals are being continuously launched by either scientific societies or professional publishers. To get indexed by major online databases, a journal needs to find its *niche* and provide added value to the existing scientific literature. To achieve that, apart from covering common topics, we focused on some unique features, such as education, research methodology and quality management in clinical chemistry and laboratory medicine. Moreover, the journal launched a section on biostatistics to educate our readership on descriptive analysis, confidence interval, hypothesis testing, odds ratio, diagnostic accuracy, survival analysis, meta-analysis and many other related topics. The articles on biostatistics have actually become the most read, downloaded and cited items of the journal.

Timely and regular publication

Biochemia Medica publishes print and online issues three times a year, on 15th of February, 15th of June and 15th of October. To meet the deadlines, we standardised manuscript submission and publication workflow and regularly arranged editorial meetings.

Quality of the journal content

Quality is reflected in the novelty, originality and scientific validity of the published articles. Our team does its best to

attract great authors and encourages them to submit their work to *Biochemia Medica*. We frequently invite presenters at relevant conferences, PhD students, residents and Croatian scientists abroad to contribute to the journal. To assist our authors, we published a series of articles on biostatistics and research methodology.³ Moreover, we established constructive, comprehensive and author-supportive peer review to further increase the quality of the journal.

Quality of the editorial work

Biochemia Medica is an open-access journal. All articles are freely available in HTML and PDF format. A signed authorship statement and a copyright transfer form are required for any submission. The authors are responsible for research integrity and ethical authorship. They should ensure that all contributors listed as authors made a significant contribution to the work.

All submissions to the journal are handled by the editor in chief and assistant editors. For many years, we had a group of four enthusiastic editors only. This year three new assistant editors joined our team. Remarkably, work at the journal is unpaid, and editors did not pass any formal training courses on editing.

Reviewers of the journal are requested to report any suspected or obvious misconduct in the submissions. When research misconduct is reported by reviewers or readers, we follow the relevant flowcharts of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) to solve problems. We have detected plagiarism in a few submissions. Fortunately, these plagiarised papers were tracked during the peer review and rejected. Nonetheless, we recently retracted a self-plagiarised publication from Iran. The case of self-plagiarism was brought to our attention by the editor of the *Journal of Gastrointestinal and Liver Diseases*. In 2009-2010, the authors published three overlapping articles, originating from the same study and reporting similar results. As a result, the article published in our journal was retracted, with an explanation sent to the authors and a decision to use duplication detection software for any manuscript processing.

To ensure integrity of research publications, we pay attention to the clarity of information placed in the 'Methods' and 'Results' sections of original papers. We also ask our authors provide details of ethics approval.

A major step towards more transparent disclosure of competing interests was the revision of our policy



in accordance with the Statement on Conflict of Interest for Authors.⁴ Our authors are now obliged to declare any potential source of competing interests that might have affected their work.

Finally, we switched to online manuscript submission and peer review along with launching a new website (www.biochemia-medica.com).

Technical quality of the journal

All accepted manuscripts undergo copyediting by one of our assistant editors, who checks for consistent use of terminology, units of measurement, abbreviations and nomenclature in laboratory medicine. PDFs of all copyedited articles are sent to the authors for proofreading before publication.

International editorial board and the journal visibility

Our editorial board members serve as reviewers and ambassadors of the journal. They are encouraged to promote the journal articles in their scientific communities globally. Half of the editorial and reviewer board members are international scholars. As a result of joint efforts, the journal receives an ever-increasing number of papers from Europe and elsewhere. The majority of our authors and the journal website visitors are from outside Croatia, mostly from the US.

Biochemia Medica was accepted for indexing by EMBASE/Excerpta Medica and Scopus in 2006. It got indexed by Science Citation Index Expanded two years later, got its first Impact Factor (IF) in 2009 and accepted by Medline/PubMed

in 2011. Related increased visibility of the journal led to the rise of high-quality submissions, more website visits and article downloads as well as higher citation rates. As a result, the IF of the journal steadily increased from 0.660 in 2009, 1.085 in 2010 to 1.343 in 2011.

Our next step forward is to join CrossRef and some of the learned associations for journal editors, particularly the COPE and the European Association of Science Editors (EASE). The latter will help us advance our editing skills by attending educational meetings, networking with colleagues, familiarising with updated guidelines and some other resources.

Acknowledgements

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References

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EASE 30th anniversary

Interviews with Honorary Life Members



ELISABETH HESELTINE

Long-time EASE member Elisabeth Heseltine, perhaps best known for her training workshops on scientific communication, was elected an Honorary Lifetime Member at the conference in Tallinn.

Mini bio: Elisabeth Heseltine started travelling early, leaving England at the

age of 6 to go to school, first in Ottawa, then in Upper State New York and then on Long Island, where she had brilliant teachers of both science and English, which may explain how she became a scientific editor.

After 10 years at McGill University, she left with a BSc and an MSc in physiology for Cambridge (England), where she worked in the Pharmacology Department. One May morning, cycling to work, she realized that she had been at various educational institutes for 20 years, and decided to take a look outside. She worked as a researcher on 'Horizon', a science programme on BBC television.

Finding herself with two small children, she worked

at home for Leo Cooper Ltd, which published military history books. She then moved to France to live in various precarious structures, including an inflated dome (we are now in the early 1970s). To pay for the brown rice and soya beans, she got work doing scientific editing with the World Health Organization and particularly with the International Agency for Research on Cancer. There, she was told about EASE, and she attended the meeting in Pau. This began a life-long enthusiasm for EASE, which culminated in membership on the Council. By then, she had started running workshops in scientific communication ('running' being the operative word), and has travelled the world since, doing the workshops and also writing reports for meetings of United Nations agencies. A great life, but the garden suffers.

How did you become involved in EASE and what are your earliest memories?

I became involved with EASE through Dr Walter Davis, who was my predecessor as head of the unit of publications at the International Agency for Research on Cancer. My earliest memories of EASE are at Pau, where I met the the largest concentration of kindred souls that I had hitherto seen.