

# East and Central African Journal of Surgery

## Editorial

In 1956, the Sixth-Form Pupils of the Hendon County School were made guinea pigs for a new syllabus of English Language for Scientists. As I remember it now, the course consisted of exercises whereby masses of scientific data had to be analyzed and the results expressed in good prose or, perhaps more importantly, essential facts and their significance had to be gleaned from a screed of verbose text.

To me, at that time, it seemed an unnecessary burden added to the A-level courses in chemistry, physics, botany and zoology, an O-level mathematics course in algebra, calculus and coordinate geometry (to support the physics) as well as an interesting course on comparative religions from the Head Master.

Passing the examination simply gave a second pass in English Language; even that has never taught me to spell. Nowadays I would be diagnosed as suffering from dyslexia. The course stood me in good stead for medical editing but I wonder whether it was ever used again. I was elected to the Council of the ASEA in 1974 and was the Honorary Secretary for three years from 1976. During those years I published an annual News Letter which contained abstracts of some of the most interesting and seemingly important papers read at our meetings. In 1977, Zambia, for the first time, hosted the ASEA Annual Conference. Some very good papers were presented and I, determined that all that scientific wisdom should have a wider circulation, gained Council's permission to edit and publish Volume One of the Proceedings of the Association of Surgeons of East Africa.

In those days of relative prosperity, and helped by an enthusiastic (and beautiful) marketing manager, all the expenses were covered from advertising, mainly from Zambia and Kenya. Preces of all manuscripts received from the regional meetings and annual conferences were typed, corrected, edited and then retyped until a clean copy could be presented to the printers. The copy was then typeset in hot metal and galleyproofs run off. New topographical errors, bad word splits and missed out sections

were identified and the sections were reset. New galleys were then run and the process repeated. Finally the figures, tables and page headings were added and pagination worked out to give each author a possibility of reprints and the advertisers the desired space opposite appropriate text. From the perfect typescript to the bound copy took at least three months and to have the journal ready by the end of the year necessitated much burning of the midnight oil.

Printing technology progressed from hot metal to photolithography and then to computerised typesetting. Fifteen years later it was possible to send the whole journal to the printer on a single floppy disc. That really coincided with the last issues of the Proceedings. The whole fifteen year cycle was made much more valuable by the indices prepared by Matt Oliver in Bulawayo. Those fifteen volumes contain much of the scientific work done in our region between 1975 and 1993 and would give any author a good starting point for a paper or dissertation on almost any surgical subject. Medline-type searches yield far less relevant material from other parts of the world.

Quite early on, we endeavoured to get the Proceedings into the Index Medicus. Three copies were necessary and so three years passed. We then heard that, in the opinion of the assessors, data published in an African "house journal" was not a priority with the readers of Index Medicus.

With this in mind, in 1994, we decided to change the format of the journal. It would become a peer-reviewed journal open to submission of papers from both inside and outside the Association which would be judged purely on their merit and relevance. I, fondly perhaps, hoped that this would reduce the workload from the precis format of the Proceedings. In the event, the time taken to correlate the reports of the reviewers, to write back to the authors and then finally to edit each paper has proved even more time consuming. It became impossible to maintain the target of two regular issues a year.

This is the second issue of Volume 5. It should have been published at the end of last year. At that time I gratefully handed over the editorship to Professor Ignatius Kakande of Kampala, a most experienced and prolific writer of scientific papers. I agreed only to complete this issue and here, at last, it is.

In the hands of Professor Kakande, I am sure that the Journal will prosper and, hopefully, will become of recognised worth to be indexed. Perhaps electronic publishing will aid wider distribution. I will hope to persuade some colleague to make a quinquennial index of these first five volumes because, without an index, much valuable information will remain buried.

I have many people to thank for their encouragement, support and downright hard work. I have a wife who can spell and has no hesitation in putting her red pen though too long or ungrammatical sentences. Jane has proof read all the final copy of these issues.

Rosemary Hepworth has been the real publisher as well as the Assistant Editor. As the production moved to Bulawayo, she has been responsible for all the liaison work with the printers, Daily Print, who have given us excellent service. She has been responsible for all the checking and rechecking of page make up and titles and the change to an A4 format. We hope that, in the future, this format will facilitate the easier inclusion of advertisements. This would help the finances of the journal enormously.

I must thank my Editorial Board. Every paper published has been reviewed by at least two members. On some members I have laid a large volume of work. Those more accessible and adept at returning the papers within 24 hours (Professor Krikor

Erzingatsian being the prime example) have suffered overload. Others in more specialised fields, such as radiology and radiotherapy of which I have only a rudimentary understanding, have given invaluable advice. The improved quality of the journal is due to the constructive criticism of the reviewers. An editor tends to slog away at the copy received but the board members have been far more objective, rejecting some 25% of all submissions and referring a similar number back for major alterations.

In retrospect, I enjoyed that "English for Scientists" course and I have enjoyed the technicalities and literary work of editing your journal. I have enjoyed my career as a surgeon and the editorship has certainly broadened my interests and taught me something of surgery far removed from my chosen specialty of orthopaedics.

The decades pass, however, and it is time for a redistribution of the remaining time. Retirement from the teaching hospital has not lessened the weekly surgical load in Lusaka and around the up-country hospitals of Zambia but I hope soon to start writing up my own research and to spend more time on my other interests, particularly my neglected hobby of documenting some aspects of the botany of our part of Zambia. I also have many un-read books and a lot of fishing tackle that has never been used.

Please give Professor Kakande the help and support that I have had over the past twenty years. The quality of your journal cannot depend on the editor. It is the authors, reviewers and publishers who determine the worth of the final product.

John E Jellis OBE FRCS FRCSE.