

New Year reflections on professionalism

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Over the years, *Medical Education* has published articles on many different topics, but arguably none more fundamental to the formation of good doctors than those which look at the development and fostering of professionalism. Just as professionalism lies at the heart of medical practice, so the literature of a subject lies at the very heart of a discipline and represents the intellectual and scholarly life that makes a discipline distinctive.¹ Journals should reflect the concerns and interests of their readers. This journal is nothing if it does not support and participate in the enterprise of medical education in which its readers, authors and reviewers are all involved. As an academic journal, *Medical Education* is committed to reflecting the values of the community of medical educators it serves in applying to itself the highest possible standards of professionalism. Furthermore its increasingly high standards of publication are dependent on, and evidence of, medical education's growing confidence in itself as an academic discipline. An internationally recognised and well-respected journal is a witness to the increasing professionalism of any discipline's practitioners and researchers.²

In this editorial we outline some of the ways in which *Medical Education* is developing its own practice in line with emerging standards in medical publishing.

COMPETENCE AND COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE

Traditionally journals have been the favourite projects of a small group of enthusiasts and pioneers. In addition to their regular jobs, editors work away at evenings and weekends for sheer love of the thing and out of a desire to serve their community by providing useful material and stimulating research and debate. Of course, this model still holds good, but is increasingly at risk from pressures caused by changes in working practices, the development of technical advances in publishing, growing expectations among readers and subscribers, and the increasingly complex economics of producing journals and selling subscriptions. We are constantly looking at ways of balancing these pressures while providing a high standard of service to readers and authors. Frequently these changes take place within the editorial office or team and involve very minor changes in procedure or policy, but where they have a direct impact on the groups we serve, we pledge ourselves to announce them in good time and as widely as possible.

REFLECTION AND SELF-AWARENESS

We keep our readers constantly in our thoughts and so, where we are

able, we attend conferences and conduct surveys to find out what they want to read. As a response to our readers' calls for papers offering a solid body of information on education research, we are pleased to launch this month two new series, *Making Sense of Qualitative Research and Current Perspectives*. The *Making Sense*^{3,4} series will offer an authoritative and inspiring collection of papers by leading researchers in the field on the use and potential of qualitative research in medical education. *Current Perspectives* is a response to our readers' desire for up-to-date perspectives on current issues of vital importance to students, researchers and practitioners. Each paper in the series will offer a review of past and present work, outline the current debates and offer an expert perspective on where future research might lead us. We launch *Current Perspectives* this month with a paper by Kevin Eva on clinical reasoning⁵ and are looking forward to further papers throughout the coming months. In addition, our series on quantitative methodologies, *The Metric of Medical Education*, will continue to add to the literature in this important area during the coming year. We repeat our invitation to readers to keep us informed about what they want to read – and in return we undertake to respond positively where we can.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Hand-in-hand with reflection is accountability; where reflection

reveals a challenge or an area for improvement, accountability requires us to act and make our actions known. As part of our drive for accountability members of the editorial team conduct research into issues affecting the journal community.⁶ In this issue, we present a paper by John Spencer and Linda Snell which gives the results of a survey we conducted into the attitudes of *Medical Education* reviewers.⁷ Some of the results surprised and challenged us, and we will be making use of these data in our efforts to improve our service to reviewers. Other work will follow.

Another way of making the journal more accountable to its readers is by making its processes more transparent. *Medical Education* has always tried to keep its readers informed about editorial processes and policies, and to give advance notice of editorial direction.^{8,9} The New Year is a good time to commit ourselves once again to this. In November 2003, an independent subcommittee of the *Medical Education* Editorial Board was set up with the aim of 'reviewing, monitoring and reporting to the Editorial Board of *Medical Education* on policy and procedural matters that impact upon the medical education community'. Its first report will be made public shortly and we warmly welcome the participation of this group.

ETHICAL PRACTICE

The journal has, since October 2004, been proud to carry on its back cover the logo of COPE, the Committee on Publication Ethics,

as a sign of our commitment to ethical practice and professionalism in journal editing. Naturally we try to deal ethically in every area of the journal's activities⁹ but we also want to support best practice in medical education and research in the wider field.

In recent years, we have introduced stronger procedural safeguards designed to protect authors and reviewers and encourage the explicit revelation of, for example, authorship details, conflicts of interest and so on. In this issue, we publish a discussion paper which deals with the responsibilities of authors to conduct and report research ethically, and offer a personal view of how we can work together to foster a more responsible environment.¹⁰ This is part of our drive to collaborate with the medical education community to raise standards of research and publication.

The key to making all these New Year resolutions work is, of course, the wonderful support the journal receives from its editorial board, deputy and associate editors and also from the international community of academic medicine. *Medical Education* sits at the intersection of research with clinical practice and day-to-day teaching. Every day in the editorial office, papers are busily crossing and criss-crossing between authors, editors and reviewers. Through this process, minds are meeting to assess and debate the latest developments, select the finest research and develop new ideas to take the

enterprise of medical education, and along with it, *Medical Education*, forwards into the future. Academic medicine is a community in constant conversation with itself and it is the active participation of literally thousands of authors, reviewers, advisors and readers that enables the journal to involve itself in and reflect its environment.

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