

Editorial

Plus ça change . . .?

Who remembers the Royal Shakespeare Company production of *Romeo and Juliet* that followed the brilliant Peter Brook conception? Who can speak for 10 minutes about the U.S. President who succeeded Abraham Lincoln? How (if he hadn't lost his head for being a tax farmer) would Lavoisier have topped his discovery of the existence of oxygen? These thoughts crossed my mind on January 3rd as I took over day-to-day editorial responsibility for *International Psychogeriatrics* from Robin Eastwood.

Robin Eastwood was not the first person to edit this journal, but he edited it for longer than anyone else, and oversaw a complete revamp of its design and a very marked development in the quality of papers and editorials that it published, which ran well ahead of the rapid general development of the field of psychogeriatrics over the 8 years or so that he was at the helm. As Alistair Burns's tribute in the March issue implied, my predecessor's will be a hard act to follow. My aim over the 4 years for which the board of directors of the International Psychogeriatric Association (IPA) have given me the privilege to edit *International Psychogeriatrics* will be to build on the very solid superstructure which Robin and earlier editors have laid, in

order to ensure the undisputed primacy of this journal in the broad area of mental health and illness in later life. We compete with a small number of other specialty journals in the field, but none has our dual advantage of being both international and having a large and guaranteed circulation of subscribers who, as members of IPA, receive *International Psychogeriatrics* as a benefit of membership. If we play our cards right, these twin factors should help to ensure that anyone planning to publish a paper pertaining to mental health and the elderly will come to us first as a matter of course.

I do not want to buy into what I regard as empty controversies about nomenclature. Psychogeriatrics may not be a pretty word, but it has exemplary classical roots, is shorter than many popular alternatives (e. g., psychiatry of old age), forms part of the title of the association of which this journal is the flagship publication, and is well recognized around the globe. There are no plans to change the name of our association or of this journal. We want to publish papers that deal with all aspects of the elderly and their mental health, by authors from every relevant discipline, originating from as diverse a range of geographic

areas and ethnic backgrounds as is humanly possible, while maintaining existing standards of excellence and establishing new and even higher ones.

Sporting teams that add up to more than the sum of their parts tend to perform well above expectations. If our team does that, then *International Psychogeriatrics* will be a world beater! I have inherited some members of Robin Eastwood's team and am in the process of adding some new ones. Judith Sylph, the Cambridge-based editorial assistant who succeeded Nancy Raley, has been a tower of strength during this transition period. She has worked very closely with her successor, the Melbourne-based Marilyn Cain, with whom I have had a close, productive, and highly enjoyable working association for 3 years now. From the start of July, Marilyn will be sole editorial assistant and all correspondence with the editor's office will go through her, though papers should continue to be submitted to journal headquarters in Chicago (see inside the back cover of this issue for address, contact, and submission details). John O'Brien, one of the brightest and best of the up-and-come (i.e., no longer coming but arrived!) generation of academics, has agreed to be deputy editor and has already been a great asset while spending 6 months' sabbatical in my Melbourne department. John Chibnall has agreed to stay on as statistical advisor and I have forged an efficient and effective working relationship with Rose Mary Piscitelli, who coordinates production and distribution at our publisher, Springer Publishing Company in New York. My friend and colleague, Edmond Chiu, who has already done so much for psychogeriatrics in general and IPA in particular, has been a great support as

chairman of IPA's publications committee. Last, but not least, IPA's Executive Director, Fern Finkel, continues her influential and supportive role as managing editor.

The terms of all associate editors ended with the term of the previous editor-in-chief. In appointing a new panel of associate editors, I have tried to blend youthful enthusiasm with experience and wisdom, while seeking to maintain and extend the diversity of the panel. Additional associate editors will be appointed over the next few months and all will now serve for defined, potentially renewable terms in future. Our associate editors will be worked hard. I plan to call upon them all for regular reviews of papers and books and for advice about the content and development of the journal. I look forward to meeting with as many of them as possible at a formal meeting to be held at the forthcoming IPA Congress in Chicago in August. I shall also consult with former editors of the journal on a variety of topics, as they have a vast reservoir of expertise and experience.

What of the content of *International Psychogeriatrics*? At the front of the journal we have had, and will continue to have, editorials that comment on the burning issues of the day, that provoke debate, and challenge comfortable orthodoxies. Most of our editorials will be written by invitation, but I and the editorial team would be pleased to hear suggestions for editorial topics and authors from readers and members of IPA. There are a very few essentials for good editorials. They must be interesting, they must be well written, and many will be topical. Of course it can be tricky to get up-to-date comment on matters of the hour when there is a

finite lead time required to commission, write, edit, typeset, and print, but I promise to do my best in this regard. I will be striving to ensure a broad cross section of disciplines, geographic origin, and viewpoints, but most of all I want to commission editorials that will excite the readership to think, comment, and respond.

Peer-reviewed research papers must remain the core of our content. Standards are self-perpetuating. Obviously most authors want to publish their research in the highest profile journal possible. *International Psychogeriatrics* cannot expect to be a rival for *Nature* any time soon. However, if we can sustain an impact factor (1.118 for 2002) that matches or exceeds that of our direct competitors, we can expect to attract the best papers available for publication. I would like IPA members to turn to us first because they want to support the IPA flagship, but if we are the best at what we do, then we will be supported anyway. At the moment we have a rapid turnaround from acceptance to publication. We aim to keep it that way and will be relying on those of you who are invited to review papers to continue to do so expeditiously so we can give authors a quick decision on the papers they submit for assessment.

Occasional case reports can enliven a journal and educate its readership. One of my first career breaks was to get a case report published in the *British Journal of Psychiatry*, so I have a soft spot for the genre. Please send us reports about your unusual and interesting patients.

A vibrant letters section is a characteristic of some of the most interesting medical journals (e. g., *The Lancet*, *BMJ*, *New England Journal of Medicine*). Letters

may be of two broad types: those that contain data but are too brief or specific for publication as peer-reviewed papers, and those that comment on and respond to current issues, recently published papers, and other letters. Robin Eastwood was always keen to have a letters section and used to bemoan the fact that no letters for publication were ever received. This editorial should be read as an open invitation. Write to us and tell us what you think about our field, this journal, its editorials, papers, or reviews.

I have been book review editor of *International Psychogeriatrics* since 1996 and have been amazed and delighted at the range of books we are sent to review and at the good-natured alacrity with which so many reviewers not only agree to read these offerings and review them, but also the way that nearly everyone I have asked has consistently submitted their reviews on time or even early! However, I note that a number of important books whose subjects would be of great interest to the readership of this journal have not been sent to us for review over the past 7 years. So hear my plea. If you are editing or writing a book relevant to the broad area of psychogeriatrics, implore, harass, and compel your publisher to send us a review copy, and if in doubt, check with us that we have received it. Nothing yet sent has failed to be reviewed (though a few titles are still in the review and publication pipeline) and for the moment we have space enough to keep up that record. I have had too much fun as book review editor to give it up straightaway, so with hubris comparable to Gough Whitlam, who decided to be both prime and foreign minister upon his triumph in Australia's 1972 general election, I plan to be both editor-in-chief and book review editor for the time being. If it all

gets out of control, Edmond Chiu and John O'Brien can play Sir John Kerr's role and clap me in irons until I appoint a new book review editor!

So here we go. I will not be leaping into print with my own editorials very often, but I look forward to working

with all of you as reviewers, authors, and interested readers of the journal.

David Ames
Editor-in-Chief
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