



*The Annals
Inspection & Projection*



The Annals: Inspection & Projection

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ABSTRACT

The Annals of the Academy of Medicine has a short history with a steep learning graph. Five chief editors have nudged an in-house publication into a respectable general journal catering to the major specialties of Medicine. Its editors share an interest in Nature and humankind with its readership, consisting of specialists of all kinds. The Annals invests intellectual energy in the growth of biomedical knowledge and institutions in Singapore. Its editors believe that the journal's forum for research and debate is an integral part of the infrastructure of Singapore's biomedical science enterprise. The editors appeal to the enlarging community of bioscientists and clinician investigators to contribute more actively to the peer review of submitted articles. The rigour of peer review of new medical information reflects the quality of the experts' skeptical thinking. This journal hopes, as a partner, to provide opportunities for authors to present their discoveries and thoughts in an exciting chapter of the nation's history.

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Key words: Clinician investigator, Medical publishing, Peer review, Research forum

The lifespan, 35 years, of the Annals Academy of Medicine Singapore (as per PubMed) is about one human generation. It is a branch of the local Tree of Medical Knowledge; a little organic record that is subject to the biological and environmental forces acting within the community of specialists.

In this instance, the Annals (AAMS), published by the Academy of Medicine, represents an expression of the core values and the mission of some specialists to deliver pertinent biomedical information to Academy members and Fellows. The energy invested in the production of any journal of medicine derives from the conviction of a few persons that the end product is ultimately a worthy return on that investment. In the case of the Annals, much of the energy is extra-duty: none of the members of the Editorial Board, and none of the many expert reviewers, receives any remuneration for the sometimes onerous peer review of submitted articles. Similarly, because the Academy is a non-profit entity, the Annals editorial staff also bear some sacrifice.

But in a sense the journal's history in many ways reflects the ethos of immigrant pioneers that infused at first the town, then the city, and latterly the nation, of Singapore (Table 1). In the growth of any young organism, sacrifice is a recurring theme, whether borne by a parent, another first-degree relative, or a guardian. If people associated with the organism no longer believe, or care enough to make sacrifices, then it withers away. The involution of non-life-enhancing body parts or processes is one of the prices the organism pays as it evolves over time.

The writer is happy to acknowledge the Academy's debt to the past editors in chief of Annals; namely, Dr Chew Chin Hin, Dr Tan Ngoh Chuan, Dr Lee Seng Teik, and Dr Felix Sundram. These sterling contributors to the Annals were staunch but unassuming Academy Fellows, whose legacy stands as material testimony to the knowledge-based outreach of the Academy of Medicine. When the newly qualified specialists – potential members – ask what the Academy's activities comprise, the Annals peer review and publication system springs to mind. Future Fellows are well advised to support this valuable and visible core function.

A 2006 innovation is the Citation linkage to the Institute of Scientific Information (ISI, USA), plus an impact factor (IF). These are early days indeed in the new publishing phase; both citation number and IF need to

grow stepwise. Whereas neither journal nor research quality should be judged on the IF alone,^{1,2} an increase will help the Annals to attract value-adding articles. This objective is a pragmatic one: the Board wishes to enhance the quality of local biomedical researchers' life by adding citation value to Annals articles.

The biomedical science community in Singapore is at a turning point. For the first time big amounts of public money have established key research institutions, peopled by well-motivated senior bioscientists. Mid-rank bioscientists are incubating in highly regarded research centres. Shortly it should become clear whether the new system will work with enough coherence and productivity to set up a beneficent cycle. The coordinated chain of enterprise holds promise for physicians too.

There are many more clinician-investigators than when this writer became a consultant physician two decades ago. Even the number of postdoctoral clinician-scientists is enlarging, although at a lower pace. On behalf of the Editorial Board, the writer appeals to the enlarging groups of research skilled doctors to seize the challenge, make appropriate sacrifices, and to elevate the journal's functions to a new, more respectable level. How can they do so? By making time and effort for expert peer reviews.

The network of expert clinicians and scientists which supports the peer review system of the Annals includes overseas academics. Whether the Singapore bioscience network, in particular the younger home-based specialists, will lead the hard intellectual work of reviewing and editing over the next decade, remains to be seen.

Some unpredictable forces in the ecology of specialists in Singapore threaten to disrupt the local network. The influx of foreign doctors could work either way for the Academy. It is too early to know if the forces will weaken or, alternatively, strengthen the Annals. But we are able to shape, in part, its outcomes. What are the main hopes of the Annals Editorial Board? That by 2015, many plucky birds which fly off to feed on biomedical knowledge will have come home to roost. And that a significant number of the vanguard of new clinician investigators will submit their research reports to the transformed Annals by choice.

References

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Table 1. Milestones of Annals, Academy of Medicine, Singapore

Date	Details
1972	The first issue of the Annals (designated New Series) was published in the first quarter of 1972. It started as a quarterly publication. The first Editor was Dr Chew Chin Hin.
1974	Dr NC Tan was appointed by the Council of the Academy of Medicine, Singapore as the new Editor.
1979	The Annals was accepted for inclusion in Index Medicus.
April 1981	A fulltime Editorial Assistant was appointed.
July 1985	The 1 st Workshop on Medical Writing and Editing was held in July 1985. It was the first Workshop of its kind to be held amongst the medical and dental fraternities in this region. The teaching faculty from London comprised the following:- Dr Stephen Lock, Editor, BMJ; Ms Jane M Smith, Assistant Editor, BMJ; Dr Alex Paton, Dean in Charge, Postgraduate Medical Education, North East Thames Health Region; Dr William F Whimster, Reader & Head, Department of Anatomy, King's College, School of Medicine and Dentistry.
1988	The Editorial Board has made significant changes to improve the Annals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Instructions to Authors were amended to further match the requirements sought by scientific journals of international standing. • The "Summary" was renamed "Abstract," as the term is well-used by journals of international standing. • Degrees (or professional diplomas) allowed after each author's name were standardised to 3 per author.
July 1988	The 2 nd Workshop on Medical Writing and Editing was held in July 1988. The lead teaching faculty was Dr Stephen Lock, Editor, BMJ. The core items of the programme for the Writing Workshop were designed to instruct young doctors on the technicalities of writing good medical and scientific articles.
1989	The Annals successfully increased the number of publications from 4 to 6 issues on a bimonthly basis. Two issues will be devoted to Free Papers in May and November each year, to cater to the increasing demand from local authors for their papers to be published in the Annals.
July 1989	Dr NC Tan retired as Editor. He has served as Editor for 16 ¹ / ₂ years. Dr ST Lee was appointed by the Council of the Academy of Medicine, Singapore as the new Editor.
October 1991	The 3 rd Workshop on Medical Writing and Editing was held in October 1991. The lead teaching faculty were Dr George D Lundberg, Editor of JAMA and Ms Annette Flanagan, Director of JAMA Programmes and International Activities.
1993	To have better control of the production process, the Annals Editorial Office started desktop publishing (DTP) at the end of 1992. Now, it is fully into DTP and all issues published in 1993 were done on DTP in the Editorial Office.
October 1994	The 4 th Workshop on Medical Writing and Editing was held in October 1994. The teaching faculty was led by the past Editors of Annals of Internal Medicine, Drs Robert and Suzanne Fletcher. Arising from the Workshop was the formation of the Asia-Pacific Scientific Editors Association.
29 April 1995	The Asia-Pacific Scientific Editors Association was registered with the Registry of Societies. The First Annual General Meeting was held on 13 October 1995.
1996	Due to the consistently large number of free papers submitted to the Annals, the Editorial Board has decided to increase the number of Free Paper (i.e. original article) issues from 2 to 3, as from 1996. The Free Paper issues would be published in March, July and November 1996.
October 1996	The 5 th Workshop on Medical Writing and Editing was held in October 1996. The teaching faculty was led by Dr Richard Horton, the Editor of Lancet, Dr Drummond Rennie, Deputy Editor of JAMA, Dr Iain Chalmers, Director of the Cochrane Centre and Dr Sven Hernberg, Editor-in-Chief of the Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment and Health.
October 1996	The Second Annual General Meeting of the Asia-Pacific Scientific Editors Association was held on 12 October 1996. This was a combined meeting with the World Association of Medical Editors which saw the election of Dr Drummond Rennie as the new President of WAME.
June 1998	Electronic Publishing Workshop (8 June 1998) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ron Laporte • Craig Bingham • Martin van der Weyden

Date	Details
July 1998	Annals went online, with only the abstracts made available.
January 2000	Dr ST Lee retired as Editor. He was Editor since 1989. Dr Felix Sundram was appointed by the Council of the Academy of Medicine, Singapore as the new Editor. Structured abstracts were introduced.
July 2000	Articles published in the Annals were compiled on CD-ROMs. These CDs are a collection of articles published in the Annals from 1972 (New Series) to 1999. The objectives were to serve as an archive and to facilitate the retrieval of articles.
October 2000	The 6 th Workshop on Medical Writing was held in October 2000. The two tutors for the Workshop were Mr Tim Albert, Principal of Tim Albert Training and Director of BMJ Short Course for Medical Journal Editors and Dr Harvey Marcovitch, Consultant Paediatricians and Editor of Archives of Disease in Childhood. This Workshop was different from Annals traditional medical writing and editing workshops in that the participants were divided into groups of 12 per tutor, instead of the usual lecture style teaching.
January 2001	The Annals went through a revamp in 2001: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There was a change in the cover of Annals. 2. Renowned academicians and editors were invited to join Annals' International Advisory Panel. 3. The Hanging Committee was phased out and members were invited to join the Specialist Advisory Panel (SAP). The SAP assisted the Board by helping to do quick reviews. 4. A new section on Continuing Professional Development (CPD) was created. The Editor had invited the various Chapters of the Academy of Medicine to contribute articles on CPD.
July 2001	New format- Special Theme Issue (8-10 papers on the theme) and 10-12 Free Papers published in every issue. This was intended to reduce the backlog of Free Papers, and to encourage the submission of original research papers
January 2002	The Annals was indexed in the Science Citation Index-Expanded, ISI Alerting Services, and Current Content/Clinical Medicine.
January 2004	Full-text articles published in the Annals were made available online at www.annals.edu.sg . Arrangements were also made for access of these articles from PubMed via Linkout. It is hoped that the online availability of these articles will facilitate access and increase the journal's citation rate. A survey of the Academy's membership was made to see whether Fellows would like to continue receiving the hardcopy or to access it online only. 403 Fellows, about one-quarter of the total, opted to access online only. The Annals' 2004 Impact Factor was 0.375.
June 2004	Dr Felix Sundram retired as Editor. He was Editor since 1999. Professor Vernon MS Oh was appointed by the Council of the Academy of Medicine, Singapore as the new Editor. Term appointments instituted for all Editors on the Board.
June 2004	At the Academy's 26 th AGM, Fellows passed the proposed amendments to the Memorandum and Articles of Association pertaining to the appointment of Editor. <i>Article 60 – "The Editor of Annals, who is an ex-officio member of the Council, shall be elected by the Council on recommendation of the incumbent Editor and serve a total term of 4 years. If appropriate, the Editor may be elected may be elected for an additional two years. No Editor shall hold office for more than six years."</i>
January 2005	Change in the cover of the Annals. Each cover contained an image, whose origin ranged from biomedical illustrations to reproductions of local works of art.
March 2005	The Annals was published as a monthly issue. The proportion of original articles out of the total number increased somewhat. The journal impact factor, as determined by the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI, Philadelphia USA) was 0.375 for 2004.
June 2007	The Annals' impact factor was 0.419 in 2005, increasing to 0.772 for 2006.