

EDITORIAL

A time of change at the British Journal of Nutrition

I take over the reins of Editorship of the *British Journal of Nutrition* with a mixture of trepidation and excitement: the former, because of the distinguished series of predecessors in this post; the latter, because this is a time of rapid change both in the technology of publishing and in the science of nutrition.

The *British Journal of Nutrition* was founded in 1947, and there have been just seven previous Editors. This eminent line culminates in the Editorship of my direct predecessor, David Southgate, to whom the Journal owes a great debt and to whom I myself owe considerable gratitude for the kindly way in which he has helped me to move into the hot seat. Far be it for a new Editor to move into position and immediately make radical changes, but some changes are under way, resulting initially from initiatives started by David himself during his Editorship. These will affect mainly the Journal's editorial procedures, and are aimed at improving response time. The most visible, so far as readers are concerned, will be the appointment of Deputy Chairs of the Editorial Board in an effort to spread the load. This is also a recognition that modern nutritional scientists are not, for the most part, polymaths of the sort represented by my predecessors, and thus a greater breadth of expertise is needed at the level at which decisions on acceptability are ultimately made.

As members of the Nutrition Society will know, the Journal is one of three publications of the Society, the others being the *Proceedings of the Nutrition Society* (published at present four-monthly) and *Nutrition Research Reviews* (published annually). Like most scientific periodicals, the Journal has seen a steady decrease in its circulation over recent years. There has been considerable speculation recently that the 'death of biomedical journals' is at hand (LaPorte *et al.* 1995), mainly because of increased availability of, and demand for, electronic means of communication. Thus, paper journals may shortly be replaced by MOOs (multiple-use dimension object oriented) (LaPorte *et al.* 1995). (Of course, some may think this appropriate for a journal with a long history of publication of farm-animal data.) But it has also been argued that such claims are premature: just as the video recorder has not ousted the cinema, and the pen has not disappeared with the advent of the word-processor, so scientists like something they can 'curl up in the sunshine to read' (Cowie, 1995; Longmore, 1995). Readers may be assured that the Nutrition Society's Publications Management Group will be keeping a close eye on developments in publication media, but it seems highly unlikely that the printed Journal will disappear before the end of the century. (Whether it will continue in conjunction with some form of electronic publication is another matter.)

As soon as my appointment to the Editorship was announced I discovered that people wanted to tell me why they liked or did not like the Journal, why they did or did not submit their papers to it, and why they did or did not subscribe. I would welcome comments from the readership on these issues (addressed to me at the Editorial Office). The Journal must change to suit its readership, and it is only by hearing their views that this can come about. I also discovered how much people liked the Editorials written by David Southgate, rather to my embarrassment as I had decided that I could not follow his example in providing one for each issue. But I hope to persuade other people to contribute Editorial articles; and if

there are any issues without an Editorial, I can recommend getting out a back issue and having another look at one of David's; they repay a re-read.

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