

Refining information into knowledge and understanding

On the first day of this millennium, 25 years have passed since the publication of the first issue of the *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment & Health*. During these 25 years (and 15 807 published pages), the Journal has grown into a truly international high-quality scientific periodical. It is currently distributed to 53 countries, and 80% of the subscribers come from outside Scandinavia. However, the Journal has strong Scandinavian roots. It is published by 4 prominent national institutes of occupational health, in Finland, Denmark, Norway and Sweden. Half of the published papers usually come from these 4 Scandinavian countries.

Although the turn of the millennium has created new expectations and challenges in all sectors of the “information” society, work environmental and organizational factors do not change abruptly. And if they do, the change may have been predicted in a long run — even years before the change. During the last few years, significant steps have been taken also in the editorial policy of the Journal. The format and contents of the Journal were revised in 1995, and a new co-editor system was created in 1998. In 1999, the redactory office took the responsibility of formatting the Journal and the new co-editor system has been in full use, together with a new internet-based manuscript and referee system. Before retiring at the end of last year, the creator and soul of the Journal, Professor Sven Hernberg, did not lose any of his vigor or innovativeness. In fact, he is still going strong in the Journal as Editor Emeritus and represents the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health on the Board of Directors.

The aim of the Journal is to promote research and increase knowledge through the publication of scientific articles, reviews, and other information of high relevance to occupational health and safety. It has been asked every now and then whether we still need peer-reviewed scientific journals in the information society, where almost anyone can contribute an unlimited amount of information, and also utilize it, by means of the Internet — with no costs or delays. For example, 1.4 million new pages are produced on the Internet every day, and the total amount of scientific knowledge doubles in about 10 years (1). Information, facts, and details are streaming to our desks from computer data bases, communicators, and electronic mail, not forgetting the growing number of “traditional” periodicals, books, and all types of newsletters and social contacts. Although electronic publication is already a big issue, and new options for readers and authors are being planned in scientific journals, all available information is not correct or relevant, nor does it increase our understanding. Considering the ever-growing need to obtain new information — without having any more time daily to obtain it — the criteria for the quality, relevance, and reliability of new information will be essential. When we are reading high-quality peer-review international journals, we can trust that the quality of the articles has been thoroughly checked through numerous routines and that the flow and format of the text has been optimized. We can also trust that our message is not lost but is, instead, distributed, acknowledged, and utilized. In other words, we should always aim for excellence in both the true production of knowledge and its utilization.

The *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment & Health* deals with interactions between work, the environment, and health, that is, with topics such as ergonomics, environmental medicine, epidemiology, hygiene, occupational medicine, physics, physiology, psychology, safety, sociology and toxicology. As discussed profoundly in our millennium issue (2), rapidly changing work and the new physical, technological, psychosocial, and economic conditions at work create new requirements for an increase in occupational and environmental knowledge. While new “hot topics” arise — and press on new

research — knowledge on “older” areas deepens and can go into greater detail. New, original and relevant data are always given high priority in all scientific journals. In a general occupational and environmental journal like the *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment & Health*, new and relevant issues related to future work, worklife, and the environment are also relevant for future publications. However, the Journal still has its greatest expertise in important “old” areas, such as occupational epidemiology, occupational medicine, toxicology, musculoskeletal disorders, and psychosocial stress research. All scientific papers — also those from new areas — have to fulfill high quality criteria. Scientific quality is often best in “old” areas with refined concepts, theories, and methods. However, excellence in scientific quality is also expected, since relevant information in “old” areas is often achieved only by improving the design, methodology, and innovativeness of scientific approaches. New methodological approaches — like qualitative research in psychology — should also be considered. However, the evaluation and review of new methodological areas need the best possible expertise and cannot be successfully managed without an appropriate co-editor structure.

I believe that the *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment & Health* is ready for the new millennium. The new editorial policy is based on international co-operation, the flattening of the editorial organization, and the use of modern communication technology. Instead of one strong editor only, seven new editors from different countries and scientific areas (5 co-editors, the assistant editor in chief and the editor in chief) are sharing the responsibility of editing and making decisions on publication. The Editorial Board and the International Advisory Board, consisting of 75 Scandinavian and 29 international experts, also play an essential role by supporting the peer-review process, which is directed by each of the co-editors in his or her own field.

Perhaps as a sign of a modern approach, the editorial work and co-operation between the editors are based on telework and internet-based applications. The new article-based data base (called Jbase) was thus developed to allow communication between the new co-editors in different countries. All decisions and most of the discussions between editors takes place in the Jbase, which also gives real-time access to the details of all submitted articles, referees, and dates. Decisions launch e-mails. To support the editorial office, the Jbase gives internal quality reports on the flow of manuscripts and reminds the staff of delays in the review process.

Finally, as the December 1999 meeting of the editors concluded, I would like to remind authors that, in addition to “original articles” and “reviews”, the Journal continues to publish “short communications”, “case reports”, “correspondence”, and “book reviews”. We will be grateful for “opinions”, “meeting reports” and “research programs” (summaries of large scientific research programs of high relevance, including European Union projects). We also consider “practical” reviews on important issues like occupational health practice, ergonomics, and occupational health standards. An editorial is, as before, published in each issue of the Journal. “Announcements” of interesting future events are published occasionally. Please, find more details on our web site (<http://www.occuphealth.fi/sjweh>).

The editors hope that the *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment & Health* will help its readers increase their knowledge and understanding of occupational and environmental health and safety. We also hope that we can serve our future authors by maintaining excellence in the evaluation, publication, and distribution of scientific information.

References

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2. Millennium issue. *Scand J Work Environ health* 1999;25(6, special issue).

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