Editorials

Three Christmas wishes

It is difficult to believe that this is the final issue of volume 1. What makes it especially difficult is our unusual production schedule. This is being written (dictated, actually, while riding home on my bicycle) early in August. But the deadline for the December issue is early in September because even after papers are sent to the technical editor in London, much remains to be done.

My disbelief is somewhat offset by reminding myself that it is well over a year since we first began worrying and fussing about putting together a credible editorial board, and whether anyone would submit anything of calibre to a new and unproven journal. Although an editor can never have too many papers submitted, that particular anxiety proved to be the least of my worries. We have had more than enough excellent articles to choose from such that our acceptance rate is as low (or as high, depending on your perspective) as that of established journals, about 30%. In addition, we quickly set into motion a remarkably efficient and skilful review process.

What pleases me most, next to the consistently high quality of papers that we have published, is the remarkable diversity of topics, countries from which the papers originate, and disciplines represented by the authors. As readers, you may not notice these aspects (and I make a point of not doing so until after the best papers have been selected). I simply cross my fingers and hope that the diversity we seek will be evident and, for the most part, it is.

As this is a Christmas issue, it seems appropriate that I give myself the chance to make some wishes. The list begins with the wish of almost every editor and publisher: more readers, or, more specifically, more subscribers. The more we have, the bigger and better the journal will become. The hidden message for all authors and contributors (I hope most are both!) is if you’re not already a subscriber, please become one, and if you are, please find another who will follow your excellent example.

The second wish is not only that we continue to receive a large number of high quality scientific articles for consideration, but that this be balanced by as many excellent program descriptions. Over the past year, it has become evident that it is extremely difficult for people running programmes, even those featured in the issues of this volume, to write about their work. Such writing is obviously not a high priority when the mundane realities of financial survival and political machinations remain. Nevertheless, readers of this journal were promised that they would learn about what prevention programmes others were doing, the projects they were engaged in, and that they would be able to share in the triumphs as well as frustrations of those responsible. We want to help readers learn about imaginative ways of fundraising; how projects can be evaluated with limited resources; how to collaborate with other community groups; and how differences can be patched and bridges built. The need is elaborated by Mike Hayes in an editorial in this issue. This is a high priority, not only for him, but for the entire editorial board.

Along these lines, a possibly related matter (I say ‘possibly related’ because I don’t want to use up another of my three wishes) is for more feedback, not only in the form of letters to the editor for publication, but through informal letters to me or other members of the board describing what you see as the journal’s strengths and weaknesses as it has emerged this past year. Some major decisions are pending, apart from our resolve to do all we can to publish more programme material.

One decision is whether the bibliographic citations sections should be maintained. It is a great deal of work for me personally, and I hope it is a valuable resource, especially for researchers in the field, but perhaps it is not. Nowadays, with ready access to similar information by electronic means, it may be redundant or outdated. Other time consuming and possibly not very useful sections of the journal are the ‘News and Notes’ and ‘Calendar and Notices’. And what about the injury classics, the featured programmes, or the book reviews? Tell us what you think is good, or bad, or components to which you are entirely indifferent, and we’ll do our best to respond appropriately.

The third wish is, however, by far the most important. If it could be granted I would happily sacrifice the others. It is that the journal be progressively more able to play a pivotal part in putting into action all that we know about injury prevention in childhood and adolescence on a worldwide basis. This is, of course, a very large wish and an ambitious goal. But the foundations for this skyscraper of a wish have been firmly laid. ISCAIP and the journal together can bring the message to thousands worldwide about how we can take more effective preventive action.

All this would indeed be wishful thinking and quite
unrealistic if many, if not most, of the key actors across the world were not prepared to make a significant sacrifice. That sacrifice is measured in both time and money. We’re all almost certainly far too busy for our own good, for that of our families, and for those we serve. Most of us are also experiencing the worldwide recession that makes it very difficult to find $100 to invest in a society membership, or even slightly less for a subscription to the journal. In some countries, the amount being asked must seem exceptionally formidable, and I hope eventually we will be able to take this into account. But until then, there is nothing else I can do than to plead with each of you to swallow hard, dig deep (and invoke any other mixed metaphors you can think of) to make the sacrifice to become a full time player on this winning team. With a hundred new members and a similar number of subscribers, we will certainly have achieved the critical mass necessary to permit our voices to be heard on behalf of child safety everywhere.

** Three more reasons why you should go to Melbourne

This next bit may appear as if I’m serving as a travel agent or running a tourist bureau. Neither is too far from the truth because my intention is to convince you that attending the next International Congress in Melbourne will be not only intellectually rewarding but also good for the body and soul. About 10 years ago, I had the privilege of spending a hectic week in Melbourne as the Felton Visiting Professor. Despite my exhaustion from the visit’s lecturing requirements, I immediately fell in love with the city and its environs. The only other city outside of Europe that has an equally cosmopolitan flavour is, of course, Montreal. Melbourne, however, has the added advantage of glorious beaches, great scenery, and plants and wildlife unlike anything any North American or most Europeans have ever seen. So even if you aren’t the least interested in the professional part of this trip, it’s a marvellous vacation, and although it costs a small bundle for most of us, think of it as a once in a lifetime opportunity to see a magnificent part of the world.

But also think of the trip as an important chance to improve your injury prevention effectiveness. The most valuable aspect of any such meeting for me is invariably the people I meet. It is the corridor conversations rather than the formal presentations that I treasure. Being able to put a face to the name of someone with whom you later correspond, or whose papers you later read, is an entirely unique experience.

Finally, apart from these valuable casual encounters, there will be formal presentations and the ISCAIP meeting. The program makes it clear that there will be something of interest for everyone, culminating in the special program for those involved with children and adolescents. So save your pennies and book your flight.

** End of term report card

At the end of each volume many journals provide a report card for their readers. Ours will be brief. Were this a real report card, I hope the teacher’s comments would read something like, ‘Making progress — keep up the good work’. Between the official starting date, 1 September 1994, and the same date in 1995, we have received 66 papers. All but four were sent to at least two reviewers. No manuscript was recommended for publication without requesting either minor or major revisions. Twenty five were published in the first volume and many more are still pending.

Most published papers came from academic settings; a few were from health departments; and very few from service programs. The countries of origin include: Australia, Canada, England, France, Greece, Ireland, Israel, New Zealand, South Africa, Sweden, United States, and Wales. A majority of contributors were medical or non-medical epidemiologists; but the list includes dentistry, nursing, psychology, public health, general practice, maternal and child health, and health economics. Thus, we have achieved the diversity of both disciplines and countries we had hoped for.

Particular thanks are due to the anonymous reviewers listed on p 214. For the most part, referees’ comments were not only detailed and constructive but, also, as a rule, prompt. The average lag between sending a paper for review and receiving a reply was about four weeks; far better than most journals. (This is a special accomplishment in light of the notorious inefficiency of Her Majesty’s Postal ‘Service’ in Canada.) Each reviewer deserves the gratitude of the editorial board, as well as (I hope) the contributors. The journal could not function without these ‘unsung’ contributions.

IB PLESS
Editor