

Editorial

Change, Constancy, and Help Wanted (From the Whole Village)

Barry M. Farr, MD, MSc

Dr. Decker's editorial in the December 2000 issue of *Infection Control and Hospital Epidemiology (ICHE)* made several things very clear.¹ The first of these was that Dr. Decker needed help in editing this journal, because he said it was time for him to move on. He said that he had decided in August 2000 to leave his current position to accept "an offer that couldn't be refused" and that he had asked the Publications Committee to start their search for a new editor immediately.

Dr. Decker's editorial said that he had had four goals for the Journal: (1) to enhance the visibility and prestige of the Journal; (2) to grow the Journal in both reach and content; (3) to transform the Journal from being predominantly North American to being truly global in both its reach and its appeal; and (4) to enhance service to authors by expediting both reviews and publication. He cited published data regarding the frequencies of publications, citations, "impact factor," and "immediacy index," and of the articles submitted and published from international and domestic institutions to support his view that the first three goals had been accomplished. He admitted that the last goal had not been achieved to his satisfaction, however.

I believe that most Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America (SHEA) members would probably agree with Dr. Decker that *ICHE* has only become more highly respected as a scientific journal with each passing year. Now when one reviews almost any area in this field, it is usually the case that most of the most useful data have been published in this journal. Part of this accomplishment can be chalked up to the work of Dr. Decker and his excellent editorial staff and another, very large part to the SHEA membership, which has been responsible for designing, conducting, analyzing, and writing a large portion of those studies. It is, unfortunately, also probably true that many SHEA members feel that promptness of manuscript review and publication remain major targets for improvement in the *ICHE* editorial office.

When I was interviewed by the Publications Committee, I said that I had agreed with Dr. Decker's editorial and that my goal, if chosen to succeed him as editor, would be to try to maintain the scientific quality and "global reach and content" of the Journal, while trying to expedite both reviews and publication. When the Publications Committee recommended and the Board of Directors approved my appointment as Editor, it was recommended that I visit the editorial office to begin working with the current editorial staff on transition issues. While there, I was shown a computer file that shocked me. The file showed how frequently SHEA members had been asked to review manuscripts for *ICHE* and how frequently they had refused. Some had not agreed to review a manuscript in years and others had refused as many as 10 requests in a row. The managing editor said that some had told her that they would let her know if they ever wanted to help and that she needn't bother calling them until that time. Others had agreed to do a review, but then *never* returned it.

Expediency in the review and publication process obviously requires willing reviewers and reviewers who return their reviews promptly. The editor has limited ability to shorten this portion of the review process. Thus, if *ICHE* is to succeed in shortening the time from receipt until review and publication, your help will be needed. If you are interested in serving as a reviewer for *ICHE*, please let me know by answering a survey on the journals page of the SHEA web site at www.shea-online.org/Journals.html. The survey will let you not only confirm your interest, but also say what areas are of more interest to you than others.

It has long been said in medicine that, "The good are asked to do more." There has also been much debate about when and for exactly what purpose "it takes a whole village." Since I was asked to begin reviewing *ICHE* manuscripts in August 2001, I have been impressed with the quality of many of the peer reviewers' reviews and I have

Dr. Farr is from the University of Virginia Health Sciences Center, Charlottesville, Virginia.

Address reprint requests to Barry M. Farr, MD, MSc, P.O. Box 800473, University of Virginia Health Sciences Center, Charlottesville, VA 22908.

also been convinced that publishing a journal of this type and quality clearly takes the whole village. Dr. Bill Jarvis served not only as President of SHEA, but also as Deputy Editor of *ICHE* during the past few months, helping Dr. Decker and me to review manuscripts and manuscript revisions to help overcome a large backlog of work that had accumulated during the months before a new editor was selected. This editorial was being composed at Thanksgiving 2001, when there was no longer a backlog of manuscripts on any *ICHE* editor's desk!

When the editorial office asks if you will do a review, please consider this an important request. Your answer will have important effects on the promptness of both the review and the publication processes of this journal. Some SHEA members have vowed that they will "never send another manuscript to *ICHE*" because of its slowness in reviewing and publishing their manuscripts. I apologize to them for the slowness of the past and propose to expedite the process enough to regain their confidence.

In addition to the backlog in reviewing manuscripts, there also developed a backlog in publishing manuscripts (ie, issues coming out 2 months behind schedule). As a way of maximizing speed in overcoming this publishing back-

log, our colleagues at SLACK Incorporated proposed that the *ICHE* editorial office be moved temporarily to SLACK's headquarters, where it will remain for the rest of 2002. The SHEA Board of Directors voted to approve this proposal in November. Shirley Strunk will serve as executive editor of *ICHE* at SLACK Incorporated during this transitional period. She has had experience working in this capacity for multiple other journals at SLACK Incorporated and has been the person in charge of all *ICHE* production issues at SLACK Incorporated for the past several years. Until notified otherwise, all manuscripts should be submitted to *Infection Control and Hospital Epidemiology*, SLACK Incorporated, 6900 Grove Road, Thorofare, NJ 08086.

This journal is open for business. If you have a good manuscript regarding the prevention or control of health-care-related infections and/or the larger sphere of health-care epidemiology, please send it here. We'd like to publish it in this journal. If you believe that *ICHE* has been too slow in the past and will therefore always be too slow for you, please give us a chance to change that impression.

REFERENCE

1. Decker MD. Help wanted. *Infect Control Hosp Epidemiol* 2000;21:757-759.