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## Editorial

# The Old Order Changeth – A valedictory from the Editor-in-Chief

“The old order changeth, yielding place to new, And God fulfils himself in many ways, lest one good custom should corrupt the world” – Morte d’Arthur – Alfred, Lord Tennyson.

This favourite passage of Tennyson’s wonderful poem about the death of King Arthur reminds us that change is both necessary and good! I have had the privilege to serve as Editor-in-Chief of the European Journal of Cancer for the past 10 years and it is time now for someone else to take over. We are delighted that Professor Alexander Eggermont has agreed to take on this responsibility from January 2011.

The past decade has witnessed some extraordinary changes in the European oncological landscape. The major driver for these changes is the rapid pace of research and the acquisition of new knowledge. We are constantly increasing our understanding of the biology of cancer and our potential ability to use that knowledge to prevent and manage the very many diseases that we call cancer. Advances in screening, early diagnosis and treatment with surgery, radiation, chemotherapy, immunological and biological therapies are real – but present two of the greatest challenges. Firstly, the challenge of making this new knowledge available to as many people as possible – and secondly to manage the frustrations consequent on differing levels of skill, manpower, facilities and affordability across Europe.

Medical journals have a key role in addressing both these challenges – obviously their primary role is to distribute knowledge but they also serve as a platform to increase awareness of the political issues involved – especially concerning variable access to treatment. I believe that the EJC has performed very well in recent years in both of these areas. Due to the industry of European cancer researchers and the reputation of the EJC, the number of manuscripts submitted has doubled over the past decade and will exceed 2000 in the year 2010. The Editors have a difficult time in having to reject approximately 80% of all submitted manuscripts, and, as disappointed authors know, we often have to reject very good papers in order to preserve a balance across the different disciplines that the EJC serves. We are proud of the efficiency both of the Editors and the Publishers in making rapid

decisions which help those who are successful and even those who are not. On average it only takes 17 days from submission to an editorial decision, and once articles are accepted for publication they are published as articles-in-press on-line on Science Direct within 6 weeks, often in less time than that. All articles have been published in print within 5 months of acceptance in 2010. This efficiency bears very favourable comparison with other leading journals and it is a great credit to the Editors and Publishers that they can achieve this. Interestingly the Journal of Clinical Oncology (JCO) receive only twice as many papers as do we, but have 24 editors versus our 8 and 14 editorial assistants versus our 1! Our speed in both on-line and printed versions is roughly twice that achieved by the JCO. One of the revolutions over the past decade had been the change from reading printed journals to on-line usage and last year the journal had over 900,000 articles downloaded from Science Direct. Not surprisingly 40% of usage is from Western Europe but we are encouraged that over 25% come from North America and approximately 20% from Asia. Whilst original scientific and clinical trials form the mainstay of the journal, we have in recent years seen a significant increase in the number and quality of epidemiological papers, and these provide interesting data of both scientific and political importance. For example, the publication of the EUROCARE 4 study in 2009 showed very important variations in survival of cancer patients across Europe. This knowledge is fundamental to educationalists and healthcare providers.

My sincere thanks to the Editorial team, many of whom have been with me since the beginning of my term, and a special thanks to Jaap Verweij and Maurizio D’Incalci who will be leaving the EJC at the end of this year. They have been wonderfully supported by Lillian Siu and Giovanna Damia, and my thanks to John Kurtz for his very sensitive editing of the breast cancer manuscripts and to Jan Willem Coebergh who has handled a huge workload from the world of epidemiology. Paediatric oncology has for many decades been a standard bearer of best oncology practice and my thanks to Michael Stevens for his selection of papers from the paediatric community that are of importance to the wider oncological audience. In the editorial office it is impossible to say too

many good things about Suzanne Peedell – she serves all of you in her extraordinary dedication to the handling of submitted material, often dealing with the disappointed authors whose work is not accepted and ensuring that the editors keep to timelines! I have been most fortunate in serving three exceptional publishers: Anne Lloyd, Peter Harrison, and, more recently, Sarah Jenkins. From the outset I expressed a wish not to be involved in the business or commercial affairs of the journal and they have protected me from this, whilst giving the fullest possible support to me and the other editors in the development of the journal. The decision to separate EJC Supplements from the main journal has proved popular and sensible to allow the reporting of symposia in a timely sense, without competing for priority with original research. I would like to particularly acknowledge the role of Linda Brooks in helping with the development of the Supplements, and raising awareness of this development in the journal. Last and by no means least very special praise to Helen Saul who anchors the News section. This is a particular challenge in a journal that does not appear on a weekly basis, but Helen has a remarkable capacity to source timely and interesting articles which have attracted great interest through the ECCO website.

If there has been considerable change in the past decade it is for certain that this will continue in the years ahead. Perhaps the greatest challenge facing all of us involved in the management of cancer is the issue of affordability. It is widely

accepted that no healthcare system in the world can embrace all healthcare provision for cancer that our level of knowledge could provide, and this problem can only get worse as science marches ahead of financial recovery. Over the next few years there will indeed be some very tough decisions to be taken about rationing and setting priorities in cancer healthcare. What is certain is that these decisions can only be taken reasonably and fairly if they are based on correct information and sensible discussion. I am confident that the EJC will continue to play a major role in presenting the latest information on cancer and its management as best possible to inform these important debates.

I wish everyone concerned with the EJC a very happy and literate New Year!

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### Conflict of interest statement

None declared

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