

Commentary

The Asia Pacific Journal of Clinical Nutrition: its philosophy and a brief history

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With every issue of APJCN, the following statement is made:

The aims of the Asia Pacific Journal of Clinical Nutrition (APJCN) are to promote the education and training of clinical nutritionists in the region and to enhance the practice of human nutrition and related disciplines in their application to health and the prevention of disease

Each Editor-in-Chief will undoubtedly bring a particular perspective to APJCN which reflects personal strengths and interests, the socio-cultural and biomedical context of the day, how best to promote the Journal and grow its readership and how to ensure its long-term sustainability. Nevertheless, there is an original rationale for the Journal which might be regarded as its imprimatur. This was firstly that nutritional practice was poorly developed among medical graduates in the Asia Pacific region. It was also liable to be driven by pseudo-science and ill-conceived nutritional products. Where clinical nutrition was best developed was in enteral and parenteral nutrition, where each of the founding editors had relevant research and practice experience. But each recognized and also practiced a broader kind of clinical nutrition which embraced the understanding that all body functions and systems must, by their very nature, depend on the nourishment of the individual and its ecosystem dependence. In the early editorials of APJCN, which were jointly written by the Editors, the notion of Clinical Nutrition as a discipline in its own right, but multidimensional in the sense of its food and health systems, its economic and its public health reach, was developed.

In particular, clinicians were encouraged to practice nutrition at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of health care, throughout the life-span from pre-conception, and in each of the major specialties and in the sub-specialties of medicine; and they were encouraged to understand the context in which they practiced by the pursuit of nutritional epidemiology. Equally, the importance of team approaches where medical graduates and clinical nutritionists worked closely with other practitioners was supported.

This meant that the Editors expected to attract papers across wide fields and could be considered if food or nutrition was a principal aspect of the submission. In the early years of publication, there was a special interest in the rapid advancements in food chemistry and how they were re-shaping clinical nutrition thinking, notably in regard to the physical properties of food and its phytochemistry. Indeed, it was known that some of the strongest interest and citations were of such papers. This could also be said of the liberal amount of experimental nutrition in the first decade or so. But, as the numbers of papers per quarterly issue grew, and the resources were stretched, the decision was taken about 4-5 years ago to wind-out experimental animal nutrition studies unless the paper was exceptional.

It must now be acknowledge that the aspiration to have good clinical studies, including case reports, has not been realized as might have been hoped and this, in part, reflects the ongoing deficits in clinical nutrition practice in the region.

A key role, which the Journal has always seen for itself, is capacity building among young medical graduates and nutrition scientists in the Asia Pacific region, and where English was not a first language. This required enormous editorial energy and time to bring scientifically sound, but grammatically unacceptable papers up-to-scratch. Limited resources no longer allow this, and most Asia Pacific medical research establishments have access to this form of assistance. APJCN now declines to process papers which have not achieved an acceptable level of scientific English, but, if the science is right, invites a re-submission after the English has been improved. The Journal also employs an English language editorial assistant for final checking of spelling and grammar. A common error is for a spell-check to be set to repeatedly create systematic errors, not obvious to a non-regular English user. In any event, APJCN estimates that, without its existence over the last 20 years, at least 1000 young nutrition investigators in the region would not have had their first peer-reviewed publication. This is a capacity-building track record which APJCN would like to maintain.

Some comment should be made about editorial philosophy in relation to so-called Impact Factors (IF). Before they were institutionalized for purposes of competition among investigators, grantsmanship, appointments and promotions, APJCN was actively interested in its impact. But its interest was not simply a matter of whether some-one else might be able to get similar work done in the next couple of years and be cited by them, preferring a Western source to acknowledge, and to be able to marshal the resources in quick-time. Rather, what was its educative value, how did it affect public, food and health system policy? To what extent did APJCN create a body of knowledge available in the published literature, but which, historically, might have sat on a bureaucratic or institutional shelf as a report or thesis? In these respects, the Journal was, for many years, the only international nutrition journal in many medical libraries throughout the Asia Pacific Region, and certainly, the only one with Asian language Abstracts. In addition, the early

adoption of digital technology and availability of the Journal on web-site to do with nutrition information (www.healthyeatingclub.org), gave it a network of influence. The Journal can expect to further reap benefit from this. The IF trajectory has been upwards overall and in 2010 was 1.438 and 1.644 for one and 5 years, respectively. For all global English language scientific publications, APJCN is in the top 50%.

APJCN is affiliated with IUNS (the International Union of Nutritional Science) and the APCNS (Asia Pacific Clinical Nutrition Society). For several years this was also the case with the Nutrition Society of Australia and the New Zealand Nutrition Society. It regularly carries the citations for the APCNS annual Awards, extant since 1993 and beginning with Prof Tu Giay of Vietnam.

HISTORY

The APJCN was founded in 1992 by three Co-Editors, Mark Wahlqvist (Australia), Vichai Tanphaichitr (Thailand) and Akira Okada (Japan), in conjunction with the London publisher Smith-Gordon (proprietor Sir Eldred Smith-Gordon); and as an organ of the newly-established APCNS (Asia Pacific Clinical Nutrition Society). It carried Abstracts always in English and Chinese, but also the language of the Corresponding Author's country of origin (eg Bahasa Indonesian, Japanese, Thai, Tagalog, and Korean). It flourished with strong corporate sponsorship, reaching a peak circulation of some 2000 per quarterly issue. This changed dramatically with the advent of the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997-8.

At the end of 1994 (with volume 3), the publishing responsibilities had moved to Melbourne and, at that time, desktop publishing could be managed by the Administrative officer, Laura Shirven. The Journal became more digital and, in a co-sharing arrangement, was the first e-Journal at Monash University. APJCN, as its own publisher from 1995 to 1997 (volumes 4-6), co-published the UNU, United Nations University's (Tokyo) first electronic publication, the IUNS (the International Union of Nutritional Sciences) study on nutrition and ageing, *Food Habits in Later Life* (ISBN 92-808-0912-1, CD-ROM, 1995)

Blackwell Science in Melbourne then made a successful bid to publish the journal from 1998 (volume 7), with Mark Wahlqvist as Editor-in-Chief and Wendy Ma at Monash University as Administrative officer, working with the Blackwell staff. During this time, in 2000, APJCN became an SCI Journal and, from the 1st annual Impact Factor, this progressively increased. However, the costs of publication increased steeply. Even though print subscriptions never fully recovered from the Asian financial crisis, the Journal was in most Asia Pacific medical libraries and some 1300 libraries around the world. The relationship with Blackwell ended amicably in December 2002 with volume 11.

The deaths first of Prof Tanphaichitr (1940-2000), and rather later of Prof Okada (1938-2007), weighed heavily on the Journal's future. Fortunately, Prof Wahlqvist had entered the then rapidly advancing web-site field with the Healthy Eating Club (HEC) site (www.healthyeatingclub.org) – it reached as many as 50,000 unique users each month. At the time, its manager was Dr Antigone Kouris-Blazos, a Melbourne dietitian and academic. APJCN was linked to the HEC in a way that Journal articles could be popularized through the HEC Newsletter, with a free subscription-registration- and this grew to about 25,000 subscribers. The HEC and APJCN web-sites were shared. APJCN ownership moved to HEC Press in Melbourne, Australia.

In July 2007, the Journal management began an administrative transition to the National Defense Medical Center (NDMC), Taipei, during July 2006 to June 2007. It took advantage of the new Skype technology to transcend the distance at low cost. Prof Meei-Shyuan Lee, of NDMC in Taipei, became Manuscript Editor and Prof Duo Li, of Zhejiang University in Hangzhou, became Co-Editor. With this move, the Journal's server shifted from Australia, to NHRI (the National Health Research Institutes) in Zhunan (<http://apjcn.nhri.org.tw>), although the APJCN web-site can still be accessed through www.healthyeatingclub.org. The journal also features through the Australian National Library, RMIT University Publishing and ProQuest, among others.

Progressively, with its Taipei base, it developed its Co-Editorship to include Prof Kyoshi Tanaka of Kyoto, Japan, Prof Wen-Harn Pan of Taipei, Taiwan, and Prof Anura Kurpad of Bangalore, India. It has also been advantaged by the biostatistical strengths of Taiwan with the Statistics Editorship of Dr Hsing-Yi Chang and Dr Chu-Chih Chen and has a Chinese language editor, Dr Su-Chien Chang.

Among its latest developments, in 2011, the Journal has entered an arrangement with a health care education and marketing company in Shanghai to develop the "APJCN Magazine in China" for Continuing Medical and Nutrition Education. The presence in China of APJCN has been strong and extensive since its inception, especially with the Editorial Advisory Board presence of Prof Chin-Fan Gu as Editor of *Acta Nutrimenta Sinica* and the support of many senior nutrition scientists, public health workers and clinicians.

THE FUTURE

The Journal is now in its 21st year, in 2012 (volume 21), and administratively based in Taipei. APJCN should continue to promote, among other nutrition journals, measures of impact other than citation by others in the same field. At the last meeting of Nutrition Journal Editors in Porto, Portugal, in 2010, it was agreed that greater emphasis should be placed on measures of readership (like unique visitors to the journal web-site and the time spent on particular pages).

Its Editorship-in-Chief has passed after 20 years from Prof Mark L Wahlqvist to Prof Wen-Harn Pan, a distinguished nutrition scientist based at Academia Sinica, the National Health Research Institutes in Taiwan and the National Taiwan University.