

Editorial

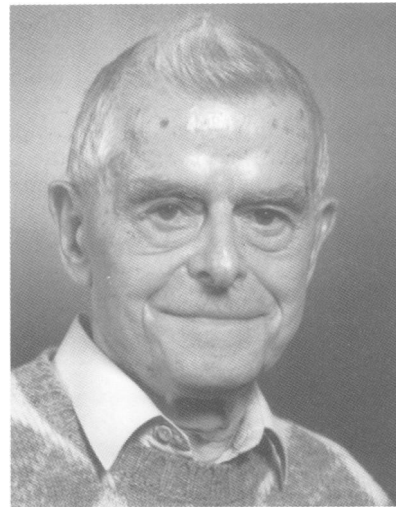
50 years of publishing social and preventive medicine and epidemiology and community health

Fifty years ago a multidisciplinary group of professionals dedicated to promoting "social medicine" established this Journal with the support of the *BMJ*. For the first four volumes, the *British Journal of Social Medicine* (as it was first called) had on the equivalent of its editorial board two representatives of the Society of Medical Officers of Health, but that explicit societal representation was then replaced by membership in a personal capacity.

In volumes 7 and 8 (but not before or after) the disciplines represented by the editorial board were stated in the Journal. They included two from social medicine, one public health, one internal medicine, one obstetrics and gynaecology, one paediatrics and child health, one human genetics, one nutrition, one applied physiology, and one medical statistics – this was in addition to the three editors from the broad field of social medicine. J A Ryle, the first holder of a Chair of Social Medicine in Great Britain and a well known physician, was on the editorial board for the first three years of the Journal before his death. So there was at the beginning a strong influence from senior clinicians, and a modest input from the professionals who would now be called public health physicians.

A general advisory board was also established from the beginning, including colleagues from Australia, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, France, Italy, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Sweden, the USA, and Yugoslavia.

In volume 9 (1955), for reasons which are not spelt out clearly in the articles published, the name of the Journal was changed to *British Journal of Preventive and Social Medicine*. However, the notice to contributors continued to offer a definition of social medicine as "that branch of science which is concerned with . . . human beings living in social aggregates . . . Social medicine takes within its province the study of all environmental agencies, living and non-living, relevant to health and efficiency, also fertility and population genetics, norms and ranges of variation with respect to individual differences, and investigations directed to the assessment of a regimen of positive health". The words were used without change up to volume 16 (1962). From volume 17 (1963), without a title change to the Journal, the notice to contributors was modified to say that the journal was "primarily concerned with the problems of *public health* (emphasis added) and their solution. The field of interest includes studies of the distribution and behaviour of disease in human populations . . . Preventive and Social Medicine also encompasses the objective study of the organisation and functioning of medical services with particular emphasis on the measurement of their efficiency." This statement continued until the last change of name to *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* from volume 32 (1978) when the words in the last sentence above were changed from "Preventive and Social Medicine" to "Epidemiology and Community Health". From volume 39 (1985) onwards the publication policy was spelt out as covering "epidemiology and community health which relates to a total defined population



Professor Jerry Morris, former member of the editorial board who co-authored an article in volume 10 and is the co-author of a paper in this issue.

. . . epidemiology and community health also encompasses the objective study of the organisation and functioning of medical services . . .". The major change has therefore been largely in the precise terminology used, although the concepts have been somewhat enlarged to include specifically health services research over the past 30 years.

In some universities and institutions the concept of "social medicine" has returned quite recently and this will be the subject of a future editorial. However "social medicine" has never been lost from the pages of this Journal, at least partly through the (British) Society for Social Medicine. This was first mentioned in volume 13 (1959) where the 3rd Annual Meeting (in Dundee, Scotland) was reported. On the same page of the Journal, the 1959 meeting of the Société Française de Médecine Préventive et Sociale (at St Malo) was announced, as was the 8th International Congress for Prophylactic Medicine and Social Hygiene to be held at the University of Innsbruck in the Austrian Tyrol in September 1960. So the society link was never exclusively British. The editorial board of this Journal was supplemented by the addition of three representatives of the Society for Social Medicine in volume 13 (1959), namely Richard Doll, A Mair and John Pemberton, and the strong research and publication links have remained. Reports and abstracts from the Society have been regularly published over these 30 years or more, and the editorial board still has representatives from the Society for Social Medicine.

Although it may be true that those who forget the lessons of history are doomed to repeat it, the current editorial board of *JECH* at its last meeting agreed that our emphasis in our 50th volume should be on looking forward rather

than simply looking back. In the event I have tried to do both in this number, as well as add some colour to the proceedings and a not too subtle change of cover style. (After hours of discussion and argument I have somewhat reluctantly agreed to leave the title unchanged for the time being.)

A long look back is to the book review of Bradford Hill's classic text by the first joint editor of this Journal, from volume 2 (1948). My Associate Editor has written a comment on the original. A more personal look back (that is, both involving a named individual and also of personal interest to me) involves the co-author of one of the papers in this number, Professor J N Morris.

Jerry Morris was on the editorial board of this Journal from volume 9 (1955) to volume 28 (1974) and the first article in this Journal of which he was co-author was in volume 10 (1956) entitled "Social and biological factors in infant mortality", from the Medical Research Council Social Medicine Research Unit at the London Hospital. (My personal interest is that I was one of the early students on Jerry's MSc in Social Medicine (*sic*) at the London School of Hygiene.) The paper in this number of which Professor Morris is co-author thus continues a major theme running back to his first paper but nevertheless looking to the future – mortality, education, and social conditions.

The featured lecture article in this number is by Professor Jennie Popay from the University of Salford in north west England. Readers may be interested to know that L S Lowry, whose artistic style is well known and focuses on industrial settings, lived and worked in Salford, near Manchester. I think that he has been as good a social critic as many professionals in social medicine, and one of Professor Popay's emphases is on "lay epidemiology".

We maintain our international links by means of our editorial board and regular and frequent contributions from many countries in Europe and further afield. Volume 50 will continue the pattern for both editorials and articles. The editorials will look to the future of epidemiology, public health and social medicine, but we will also revisit some historical articles.

I hope that readers will feel that this Journal is succeeding in its efforts to serve their interests in social medicine and preventive medicine and epidemiology and community health and public health and health services research, and that you will share some satisfaction with us in reaching our 50th year.

STUART DONNAN
Editor