

TMJ AND THE WORLD ASSOCIATION OF MEDICAL EDITORS

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The World Association of Medical Editors (WAME) is a voluntary association of editors from many countries who seek to foster international cooperation among editors of peer-reviewed medical journals.

WAME is open to all editors of peer-reviewed medical journals, having now more than 1000 members representing 620 journals, from 75 countries (as of January 1, 2004). *Timisoara Medical Journal* is represented in WAME by Mihai Ionac, its Co-Editor in Chief, since 2002.¹

The following material is aiming to introduce WAME and its standards to the readers of *TMJ* and to underline the contribution of WAME to the quality improvement of our journal over the past year.

The information on which health professionals treat their patients is based on what is published in medical journals. There are perhaps 20,000 regularly published medical journals in the world; their quality is highly variable and there are few generally recognized standards. Most medical journal editors work in isolation, usually without training or access to useful support systems and information about how they might improve their practice.

The World Association of Medical Editors (WAME) was formed in 1995 at the Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Study and Conference Center in Italy, with the aim of improving the standards of medical editing in the world's medical journals, especially those that have difficulty meeting high standards because of limited resources. WAME took advantage of the World Wide Web to address the problems of editors, so that its evolution would be independent of expensive face-to-face association meetings. Thus WAME members form an electronic

community that shares problems and solutions experienced by medical journal editors around the world.

Over the past 5 years, WAME has conducted a global survey of medical editors' needs, assembled a bibliography of relevant books and articles, published a guideline on editorial independence, and established a forum for dealing with ethical problems raised by editors. WAME leaders have facilitated regional editing workshops around the world.

During a second 3-day meeting at Bellagio in January 2001, a group of 20 editors from 12 countries in 5 continents met to map out a strategy for WAME's continued development in the service of medical editors over the next several years.² The group:

- developed a statement of principles on the standards of professionalism and responsibilities of editors;
- agreed to assess the extent to which these principles are reflected in practice and to explore barriers to their adoption, using data from a survey and focus groups;
- developed and outlined an on-line program for distance learning, targeted at new editors;
- planned for formal evaluation of the educational outreach program;
- agreed to support regional initiatives to strengthen local editorial capacity.

Underpinning all past and proposed future activities is the WAME Web site.

WAME's development has been supported by voluntary work and by support from major journals – *Annals of Internal Medicine*, *BioMed Central*, *BMJ*, *Current Controlled Trials*, *Finlands Lakartidningen*, *JAMA*, *The Lancet*, *Lakartidningen (Swedish Medical Journal)*, *Medical Journal of Australia*, *Nederlands Tijdschrift voor Geneeskunde (Dutch Journal of Medicine)*, *New England Journal of Medicine*, *Obstetrics and Gynecology*, *Tidsskrift for Den Norske Laegeforening (Norwegian Medical Journal)*, and

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Ugeskrift for Laeger (Danish Medical Journal) – as well as from the Rockefeller Foundation, the Reuters Foundation, and the US National Library of Medicine.

The significant progress towards the objectives set in January 2001 at Bellagio have been listed in the WAME Board Report 2001 – 2003, released by Ana Marusic, Past President, and Bruce Squires, Past Secretary, for the WAME Board.³

WAME BOARD REPORT 2001-2003

Dear Colleagues,

WAME rarely meets “in vivo” — the last time was at the 2001 Peer Review Conference in Barcelona, where the posts of past officers were confirmed and plans set for the future. As of January 2004, new officers have taken the leadership of WAME. As the past officers, we submit a brief report on our work, and set the frame for WAME activities in the next three years.

Perhaps the most important development for WAME in 2001-2003 was its growth: we grew from 601 members, representing 354 journals from 56 countries, in September 2001, to 1003 members, representing 620 journals from 75 countries, by the end of December 2003.

The WAME Web site and Listserve continued to serve the members by providing information and exchanging experiences among the members. In 2003, we finished the work on the new design and structure of the Web site, which will be launched in spring 2004. We are very grateful to *JAMA* for continued support and logistics of the Web site.

The Listserve discussions, maintained by the United States' National Library of Medicine, sparked up now and then, especially about ethical (and sometimes political) issues. Some of the more interesting discussions have been compiled on a separate Web page (<http://www.wame.org/listservdis.htm>) and are continually updated. The topics included to date are “Free Access to Medical Research,” “Impact Factor,” “Indigenous: To Capitalize or Not,” and “Pictures of Patients.”

Publication and editorial ethics was one of the major topics on the Listserve, and Ethics Committee was perhaps the busiest WAME Committee. The Web site section on ethics (<http://www.wame.org/ethics.htm>) rapidly developed, and now includes Ethics Consultations, where the Committee comments on ethical issues in cases submitted by the members. The summaries of the cases are posted on the Web as

WAME Ethics Discussions. The Ethics Web section also features “Web Resources on Publication and Research Ethics” (<http://www.wame.org/ethicsresource.htm>), compiled by Alexei Brovko for the Ethics Committee. The Committee is also working on the WAME Code of Publication Ethics, which will be posted on the Web site in near future.

WAME also posted several important policy statements as a basis of defining and improving standards of editorial work (<http://www.wame.org/wamestmt.htm>). These were “The Responsibilities of Medical Editors,” “Regional Workshops for Medical Editors,” “Journals' Role in Managing Conflict of Interest Related to the Funding of Research,” “Free Journal Access for Poor Nations,” and “Editorial Independence.” The WAME Policy Committee, chaired by Robert Fletcher, drafted the statements.

One of the most often used source on the WAME Web site has been “A Syllabus for Prospective and Newly Appointed Editors” — a brief educational resource for both “new” and “old” editors (<http://www.wame.org/syllabus.htm>). We are extremely grateful for the efforts of Robert Utiger, for the Education Committee, in creating the syllabus. The work on the updated version of the Syllabus is in progress.

WAME promoted educational activities for editors in different regions of the world, and offered help to local organizers of regional workshops for editors. WAME contributed to the inauguration of a regional association of editors in Africa, the Forum for African Medical Editors (FAME). FAME was created during the Consultative Meeting and Workshop for Strengthening African Medical Journals, Geneva, 14-16 October 2002, organized by UNDP/World Bank/WHO Special Program for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases (TDR). WAME also participated in the meeting on Mental Health Research in Developing Countries: Role of Scientific Journals, organized by the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse, WHO, in Geneva, 20-21 November 2003. This initiative aims at galvanizing mental health research in low- and middle-income countries, and targets medical journal editors as the key figures in research capacity building in their scientific communities. Together with the Council of Science Editors, European Association of Science Editors and other editorial organizations, we submitted a proposal for training of editors in developing countries to the Grand Challenges in Global Health program.

We would appreciate your comments and thoughts on the Web site and activities in the next three years. Write directly to the new officers and tell us how we can better connect and improve the global editorial community in the health sciences.

REFERENCES

1. Members of the World Association of Medical Editors. <http://www.wame.org/apps/members.cgi>.
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3. WAME Board Report 2001 – 2003. <http://www.wame.org/boardmeeting.htm>.