

My life as an editor - Daniel Rukavina



Academician Daniel Rukavina, Professor Emeritus at the Medical Faculty University of Rijeka (Croatia) is one of the founders and most prominent scientists in the field of reproductive immunology. He is the founder and first President of Alps-Adria Society for Immunology of Reproduction (AASIR), first President of the European Federation for Immunology of Reproduction (EFIR) and President of the International Society for Immunology of Reproduction (ISIR). Professor Rukavina is also founder and head of the Department of Biomedical Sciences in Rijeka of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts. Also remarkable is his contribution to the establishment and organisation of the University of Rijeka, as well as to the continuous improvement of the teaching process, particularly in the field of physiology, immunology and pathophysiology. He has received numerous respectable awards in Croatia and around the world, including several Lifetime Achievement Awards. During his long and rich career, he was involved in the editorial boards of several scientific journals, and he was also the founder of *Educatio Medica* journal. This year Professor Rukavina celebrated his 80th birthday, and we took the opportunity to talk with him about his experiences and reflections regarding scientific editing and publishing.

1. What was your motivation, along your extensive scientific and educational activities, to get involved in scientific editing?
There is a long history of my “wandering” before I became a member of a scientific journal editorial board. Therefore, it will be a rather different approach to editorial policy in comparison with classic examples in this section. I started my scientific career at the beginning of 1962, at the newly founded School of Medicine in Rijeka, which was the first faculty founded in Croatia outside of Zagreb itself. Zagreb has had a long scientific tradition, and during this time had a fairly good scientific infrastructure, which was not the case in Rijeka. Today, at the time of the ICT revolution, when many data are accessible to any scientist in the world simply by a few “clicks”, it is hard to describe the frustration I went through to get the relevant information for my research field. For some data, we had to wait 1-2

years! When the faculty began to receive *Current Contents* (1967) things significantly improved. However I realised the true meaning of quick access to scientific information as a postdoctoral fellow on the Fulbright program (Dallas, Tx 1972-1973). Since then I have been “obsessed” by efforts that I and my colleagues have made, not only to find the source of information, but also to actively participate in its dissemination.

2. In your experience, how can good editorial practice increase the quality and reputation of the journal, and improve science in general?

My scientific interests were initially focused on physiology and immunology. In the former country (Yugoslavia), that included Croatia, the journal *Iugoslavica Physiologica et Pharmacologica Acta* was published and I was a member of the editorial board (1972-1989). The journal was published quarterly, so every three months we had a full-day session of the editorial board.

At the beginning, the following main questions emerged: how to set up editorial policy in order to reach international quality criteria and *Current Contents* indexing, but also to ensure at the same time a sufficient number of quality articles in the country. We decided to achieve those goals by gradually raising the publishing criteria, but also at the same time by an educational approach, employing a network of carefully selected reviewers, whose critical suggestions, requests for corrections and additional experiments increase the competence of authors and thus improve the general level of scientific publishing in Yugoslavia. This approach proved to be correct, as the journal after a few years was indexed in *Current Contents*, and at the same time we have received a sufficient number of good quality papers.

3. What are your experiences of the wider social impact of journal editing?

I was the founder and Editor in chief of *Educatio Medica*, and the journal is an example of such wider impact. As Dean of the Medical Faculty in Rijeka, I was elected (1985-1988) President of the Association of Medical Faculties in Yugoslavia (AMFY). At that time, study of medicine in Yugoslavia was five years long, while in most other European countries it was six years, so we had to be brought in line with other European universities. That was not easy, because each republic, constituents of Yugoslavia, was at a different stage of development and had its own legislation, but the area of employment was unique, so we should work on creating a common framework acceptable to all. Therefore, I suggested to AMFY to establish a scientific journal *Educatio Medica* as its bulletin and to found the Yugoslav Society for Medical Education (YSME). This was realised, and I was elected Editor in Chief. 2,250 copies of the journal were printed and were available to any teacher at any of the medical faculties in Yugoslavia. The journal published articles that gave an overview of the best

European experience in the organisation of study and trends of modern education as well as discussions about medical education from European conferences and symposia that we organised. Journal editorials were written by Professor Henry Walton, President of the World Federation for Medical Education. The journal also published documents and regulations adopted by AMFY, in compliance with European standards for medical education. The concept of the new six year programme and the plan of activities in its realisation were also published. Ideas, discussions and visions that we promoted in the scientific journal received undivided support and had a significant impact on the achievement of such a large range in a country which at that time was socially and politically very unstable

4. How your work in the journal editorials was influenced by your great scientific career?

Working in the editorial boards, especially as a guest editor, as I have been in a dozen special issues, I had the opportunity to affirm and promote my research field (immunology of reproduction) which was still emerging, as well as to strengthen research network that I built in collaboration with colleagues from Europe, USA and Japan. Furthermore, that created opportunities and support to bring the world's leading scientists to a series of scientific conferences organised in Opatija (Croatia). I believe that these activities had a synergistic effect, whereby we affirmed new scientific field (immunology of reproduction) which was defined for the first time in 1953 in the famous work of Nobel Laureate Sir Peter Medawar. Besides, several other journals were reaffirmed and further profiled, such as *American Journal of Reproductive Immunology-AJRI*, *Regional Immunology*, *Clinical and Developmental Immunology* and *Periodicum*

Biologorum, in which I was a guest editor. All together gave a big contribution to establishing a European network of centres of excellence in the field of human reproduction, which was financially abundantly supported within the Sixth Framework Programme (FP6) of the European Commission (project EMBIC – Embryo implantation control) and which involved 19 research groups around the Europe.

5. What is your opinion about open access in scientific publishing?

I strongly support open access in scientific publishing. I actively participated in its promotion as a member of the European Science Foundation (ESF) and the European Medical Research Council (EMRC). As a member of Expert Group, I also participated in a meeting of the ESF on “Open Access in Biomedical Research” (Madrid, March 22-23, 2012).

My commitment to a free, immediate and permanent access (Open Access - OA) to any full text in scientific and professional journals is quite clear and understandable regarding to my research experience, mentioned above. OA is particularly important in biomedical research because the “half-life” of such articles is extremely short (6-12 months), and on the other hand, the subscription price to a growing number of biomedical journals, increasingly collides with the financial constraints of the public sector, especially in less developed countries. I believe that we should educate scientists about the benefits of OA and, through government agencies and foundations, encourage publishing in OA journals ensuring funding for publishing by the “golden way”.

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EASE 15th General Assembly and Conference

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in science editing***



For the first official EASE event in Romania, we have chosen a theme that is particularly relevant to editors in Eastern Europe and the Balkans, but also to editors anywhere working independently or in small offices. We still want to appeal to editors from other countries and major publishers, as well as freelancers and authors' editors, so we will endeavour to have something for everyone.

As usual there will be plenary lectures and possibly a panel debate. There will be 8 parallel sessions: topics are being discussed and will be announced over the summer but those confirmed so far are Can editors contribute to sex and gender equity in research? and Peer review research and training.

Pre- and post-conference practical workshops will be offered on subjects such as How to be a successful journal editor, statistics for editors, plagiarism and How to get published in high-impact medical journals (for local authors).

Further information: www.ease.org.uk