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The History of Our Journal

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The History of Our Journal

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As the publication that became the *JOGC* approaches the end of its third decade, the Journal's former Editors-in-Chief were invited to provide some background on the Journal's growth and development. Each Editor-in-Chief provided a summary of his own experience, and where memories were faulty we were able to draw on Harry Oxorn's excellent *The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada: The First Fifty Years, 1944–1994*, published by The Parthenon Group in 1994. We hope that readers will enjoy reading these perspectives.

THE BASKETT YEARS (1988–1991)

In 1987 Tom Baskett was a young member of the Editorial Board of the SOGC Bulletin, the forerunner of the Journal. He made the fatal mistake of not attending the Annual Clinical Meeting of the SOGC held at Vancouver in June 1988 where, in his absence, the Editorial Board of the Bulletin met and elected him Editor-in-Chief. He was informed of this honour in the last week of June, and the appointment started on July 1, 1988.

At this time the SOGC was bankrupt and was kept afloat financially only by loan guarantees from council members. The main reason for the financial deficit was the cost of publishing the Bulletin in both English and French. After much discussion at the SOGC Council level it was decided to sell the rights to the Bulletin to Ribosome Publishing. This was achieved by the President, Walter Hannah, in late 1988. The money from this sale helped clear the Society's debt. At this time Baskett suggested that the name of the Bulletin be changed to the Journal of the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada, and the SOGC Council agreed.

The terms of the publishing contract required a set number of pages and nine issues per year. Because this contract was the main source of the Society's income, the Council impressed on Baskett the necessity of meeting all the terms of the agreement. At that time the mandate of the Bulletin was "To provide members of the health profession with authoritative statements on subjects of current concern and

interest to the Society." In the previous year all committees of the SOGC had been asked to produce at least one article, statement, or guideline for the Bulletin. Unfortunately, most committees failed to meet this obligation, and some articles submitted were late and substandard.

Patrick Taylor joined the Editorial Board in 1989 and was promptly persuaded to write a regular column. This loyal and trusted source ensured at least one page of copy for each edition. The column began as International News with short snippets from the obstetrics and gynaecology literature. It quickly improved to become a collection of humorous and whimsical anecdotes, distantly related or not related at all to the specialty. Later it became *En Passant*, and Baskett and Taylor produced alternate month's copy. Pharmaceutical companies that advertised in the Journal conducted reviews of the readership's article preference. Surprisingly, but consistently, *En Passant* was the most-read portion of the Journal. So much for "... authoritative statements on subjects of current concern and interest to the Society."

At that time all articles for the Journal were commissioned by the Editor-in-Chief, and to meet the publishing commitment, Baskett had to call in a lot of favours from friends and colleagues across the country to fill the quota. He also wrote and partially "ghost wrote" a number of articles. Additional chores included editing all articles and proofreading the final publication copy. It was a difficult time.

After 2½ years, in late 1990 and early 1991, Baskett handed over to the new Editor-in-Chief, Patrick Taylor. Baskett was the last honorary appointment, and he remained an Associate Editor until 2002.

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THE TAYLOR YEARS (1991–2000)

In 1990, Tom Baskett, the Editor-in-Chief of what was then the *Journal of the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada* asked Patrick Taylor if he would take over the helm. Taylor agreed to do so but felt that his response was akin to that of a man who was asked why he stuck his hand into a hornets' nest. It seemed like a good idea at the time.

Taylor held the position until his departure in 2000, and he was gratified to watch the publication grow, thanks in large part to the then-publisher, Adrian Stein of Ribosome Publications, whose financial support made possible the innovations that occurred.

Originally the *Journal* was intended for transmission of policy statements, review articles, and editorials; it also contained a back page of so-called humour that had begun as *International News* and became *En Passant*. All material was published in English and French. As in Baskett's tenure, the position was initially honorary. There was no peer review, and editorial work was carried out by the Editor-in-Chief. Eleven issues (August was omitted) were published annually. The Editor-in-Chief was busy, but in time the work load was greatly eased by the provision of funds by Ribosome to hire a full-time copyeditor and proofreader; this person once saved Taylor's bacon by recognizing that "catharsis" was not spelled "cats' arses."

The Editor-in-Chief was supported by members of a by-invitation Editorial Board, who met each year at the SOGC Annual Clinical Meeting to establish *Journal* policy. The contents of the following year's *Journal* were planned. Associate Editors solicited reviews.

One problem was filling the pages. Review articles do not impress faculty promotion committees in the way that original research papers do, nor do authors invariably deliver on time. This was soon recognized and fixed; deadlines were set for delivery 2 months before the real one.

Work as the Editor-in-Chief still proved time consuming, and Taylor had to reduce his patient work load. The SOGC Council, working through André Lalonde, graciously found the funds to pay an Editor-in-Chief salary, one that over the years was, unsolicited, increased on a regular basis.

It became fiscally damaging to have translation of each complete issue into both English and French. On the recommendation of the Editor-in-Chief, the SOGC Council (not without some dissent) made the decision to publish only the editorial and policy statements in both languages, but to accept and publish original articles in either English or

French. Parce que le rédacteur en chef parle français comme une vache parle espagnol, Jean-Marie Moutquin, a true gentleman with bilingual skills, was recruited to the Editorial Board. His noticing that "frozen semen" was not to be translated as "matelots glacés" saved great embarrassment. He served the *Journal* for decades and is one of its unsung heroes.

The next quantum leap was turning the publication from one intended for education only to a fully fledged research organ. For this to happen, a panel of reviewers was drawn up, and to handle the necessary correspondence André Lalonde provided funds for the hiring of a half-time secretary. To the surprise of the Editor-in-Chief, who had believed that only second-rate papers would be submitted, a flow of submissions of increasing quality began, and the system for their handling worked like a charm.

It was an exciting 10 years, but all good things must come to an end. Relations between the Editor-in-Chief and the SOGC had not always been cordial. In 2000 an impasse was reached. As Taylor was retiring from his clinical practice, he indicated his decision to leave the position of Editor-in-Chief, but he agreed to continue in the position until the transmission of function to his successor, Jeff Nisker, could be arranged.

THE NISKER YEARS (2000–2005)

When Jeff Nisker was recruited to be the next Editor-in-Chief for the *Journal of the Society of Obstetrics and Gynecology of Canada*, his imperative was to ensure that the *Journal* became "indexed." Before Google and other computer literature search strategies, Index Medicus was the sole resource (or index) that clinicians and scientists used to learn about the existence of medical literature in their subject area outside of reading specialty-specific journals or general journals such as the *New England Journal of Medicine* on a regular basis. Attempting to achieve indexing for our *Journal* in the past had been unsuccessful.

The SOGC Executive understood the necessity of indexing for the *Journal* to reach the next level so that Canadian obstetricians and gynaecologists and basic scientists interested in women's health would submit their best research. Our *Journal* would then become the pinnacle publication for all Canadian clinicians and researchers interested in women's health. Indexing would also attract the readership of health professionals and researchers from around the world, to benefit their patients, research programs, and health policies. The subsequent citing of Canadian studies in major international research journals would further the potential of Canadian researchers to achieve research funding to undertake more Canadian studies on women's health, and

ultimately to improve women's health in Canada. Nisker made his case to the SOGC Executive and was given a larger budget than previous Editors-in-Chief, primarily to accomplish indexing.

Nisker went about recruiting an excellent staff and a stellar Editorial Board. Many members of his Editorial Board remained through Tim Rowe's editorship, and some remain today. The first major change under Nisker's leadership was to modify the Journal's name from the Journal of the Society of Obstetrics and Gynecology of Canada to the Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology Canada (*JOGC*). Nisker felt the dropping of "Society" would make it clear that the content of *JOGC* was cogent to all Canadian and international clinicians and researchers interested in women's health, rather than the Journal being a publication of a particular national professional society with the intended audience of SOGC members. Cosmetic changes were made to give the Journal a more prestigious look, analogous to that of the most respected international journals. The increased Journal budget allowed a much expanded peer review process, as well as a system for assisting physicians, who have produced excellent research, make their manuscripts suitable for publication in *JOGC*.

In preparation for submission for inclusion in Index Medicus, Nisker and the members of the *JOGC* Editorial Board solicited (even begged) Canada's leading clinician researchers and basic scientists to submit a major paper to be peer reviewed for the *JOGC*, and particularly for the three *JOGC* Issues that would be submitted to Index Medicus for review in consideration of indexing. Many of Canada's leaders in women's health research complied with this request. The *JOGC* was submitted for consideration of inclusion in Index Medicus and received the highest grade in all of the 10 areas of evaluation. *JOGC* became indexed thereafter.

Although Jeff Nisker found being Editor-in-Chief of *JOGC* a rewarding collegial undertaking, it was also a very demanding time consumer that took him away from his research program. In 2004, he submitted his resignation to André Lalonde, and Tim Rowe was appointed to continue the *JOGC*'s path.

THE ROWE YEARS (2005–2016)

By 2005 the Journal's production was humming nicely. Jeff Nisker's perseverance in the pursuit of indexing had led to the Journal's joining the grown-ups. Investigators were happy to have their work published in *JOGC*. The annual number of submissions was growing steadily. The next challenge for the editorial team was to make *JOGC* stand out among its peers.

Fortunately, in this decade the Canadian brand was respected internationally, and *JOGC* benefited from this association. In 2007 a physical makeover of the print journal, primarily instigated and championed by Vyta Senikas (Assistant Executive Vice-President of *JOGC*, and the person responsible for *JOGC*'s finances), became reality. With the involvement of a design house, the cover of the Journal acquired a distinctive look with a dominant colour of Arctic blue, deemed to be the appropriate choice for a Canadian journal. A number of prominent contributors began referring to *JOGC* as "the Blue Journal." With a publishing history now extending into decades, *JOGC* began to develop academic gravity.

Several long-running features published in the Journal helped give it a singular identity. In 2005 David Quinlan suggested having regular publication of images from clinical encounters, a suggestion that led to the ever-popular Image of the Month section in each issue. The Motherisk Group at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto contributed quarterly Motherisk Rounds on multiple topics related to drug use in pregnancy. Ed Hughes and Roger Pierson, both accomplished artists, contributed a lengthy series on art in the history of obstetrics and gynaecology. Until the rise of the Internet made guidelines readily accessible to anyone, SOGC Clinical Practice Guidelines were published primarily as part of *JOGC*'s content, and this added to the Journal's appeal both in Canada and internationally.

Despite these unique features, the international reach of *JOGC* stalled in the early part of the current decade and remained well behind that of the established journals of general obstetrics and gynaecology from the United States and Europe. From 2005, *JOGC* had been published by the Canadian Psychiatric Association, an arrangement that kept costs low and provided "boutique" service. But when in 2014 the publishing giant Elsevier (publisher of more than 2000 journals) expressed interest in buying and publishing the Journal, the potential advantages of accepting their offer could not be ignored. Elsevier could provide almost unlimited international exposure for *JOGC*; *JOGC*'s content could be included in their Science Direct database and Clinical Key search engine; each issue could be published in full colour; and the Journal's website would be overhauled and upgraded. The SOGC would profit financially from publishing with Elsevier. It was (almost) a dream offer.

However, dream offers rarely turn out to be all they promise. The advantages for *JOGC* of publishing with Elsevier gradually came to light. Recognizing that most readers of *JOGC* read the digital version or access articles online, Elsevier overhauled *JOGC*'s website and digital quality. Publication of the

print issue, and its quality, reached the desired targets by the end of the first year. With production quality starting to accelerate, it was time for a new Editor-in-Chief, and at the end of 2016 Tim Rowe handed over the position to Togas Tulandi.

Now, with production of *JOGC* by Elsevier well established and with a new and functional online submission program, the sky is the limit for *JOGC*. As former Editor-in-Chief, we are delighted with the current success of the Journal. It has come a long way indeed.