

Ashes to ashes

My wife reminds me, not infrequently, that no one is irreplaceable. Indeed, as an academic division chief I have become accustomed to job cuts, resignations and recruitment. At the beginning of this year Nature Publishing Group took the decision to bring the eight clinical Nature Review journals in line with all other Nature-branded publications and have an editorial team that is run entirely in-house, which means that I am stepping down as Editor-in-Chief of *Nature Reviews Gastroenterology & Hepatology* at the end of this month.

I remember being approached 6 years ago to become Editor-in-Chief of what was then known as *Nature Clinical Practice Gastroenterology & Hepatology*. Of all my tasks as Editor-in-Chief, what concerned me most was the requisite to write a monthly editorial. I feared this would be a daunting task. I initially intended to use the editorials to put each month's journal content into perspective. However, the closest I really came to this was when the publication of a review on travelers' diarrhea (DuPont, H. L. *Nat. Clin. Pract. Gastroenterol. Hepatol.* 2, 191–198; 2005) coincided with a family vacation to Laos, during which one of my sons developed acute gastroenteritis that led to an esophageal tear and subcutaneous emphysema (*Nat. Clin. Pract. Gastroenterol. Hepatol.* 2, 161; 2005). The compact press cycle of a monthly journal and the necessity for a quick turnover of my submissions led to a change in how I approached the editorials and processed the ideas for each piece.

I began skimming through the general medical literature for content of interest to the gastroenterology and hepatology community that may not have featured in our specialty journals. A favorite editorial of mine, on a transitional topic that I subsequently covered in a series of commentaries, discussed a patient from Arizona who was diagnosed with cholera that was linked to the consumption of raw oysters during his travels on an Alaskan cruise ship—the oysters were contaminated as a result of global warming (*Nat. Clin. Pract. Gastroenterol. Hepatol.* 2, 551; 2005). I have subsequently given my opinion on other universal topics, including academics and training, food and nutrition, obesity, sleep and jet-lag, economics and cultural expectations.

There have been two primary venues where I have written my editorials. Most often, I have written at home on a Sunday afternoon. My wife would attest that my “ah-hah” moments have always led to intense concentration and focus until the ideas mixed and matched in my head, before being transferred to the computer. She has always been the Editor-in-Chief of my life and reviewed the first drafts of my editorials before Natalie Wood, in-house Editor, worked with me to finalize the piece. The other (and current) venue for my writing has been on airplanes. Anyone who has followed my editorials will recognize the travel themes.

For those of you who also recognize the duality of my titles, or comprehend my sense of humor and tendency towards punning, you may identify where the title of this final editorial originates from. While traveling to a meeting in Europe my itinerary was substantially altered and extended because of the volcano that erupted in Iceland. I was relatively lucky, despite the temporal and financial imposition: while many of my colleagues were forced to drive or bus from Athens to as far away as Scandinavia, my wife and I ended up making lemonade from lemons. We were diverted through Madrid, where we enjoyed a lovely spring day jogging and walking in the parks, visiting the magnificent Prado and sampling tapas and wine in the city squares.

Our positions, and life itself, are only transitory. As I relinquish my editorship with sadness, I thank the readers for their interest, debate and feedback. Despite my initial concerns, the ability to personalize my observations and relate my own and my family's experiences to world, scientific, medical and gastroenterological topics has been the most rewarding aspect of my term as Editor-in-Chief. The feedback and support I have received from around the world regarding the commonality of the life experiences that I have tried to relate to the readership has been inspirational and transformed that ‘daunting task’ into a passion for writing and communicating that will be difficult to replace. I look forward to having other opportunities to share my thoughts and views with colleagues and friends from around the world.

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Competing interests
The author declares no competing interests.