

Co-publication of articles from the *Netherlands Drug Bulletin*

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As a result of a fruitful cooperation between the editorial boards of the *Netherlands Journal of Medicine* and the *Netherlands Drug Bulletin* (NDB) (Geneesmiddelenbulletin) we are proud to present the article by Professor Verheugt on platelet aggregation inhibitors in this issue of the Journal. The article was previously published as 'Preventie en behandeling van coronair trombose met plaatjesaggregatieremmers' by F.W.A. Verheugt in NDB 2002;36:133-40.

For the future it is planned that articles from NDB that may be of interest to specialists in internal medicine will also be translated and published in the *Netherlands Journal of Medicine*.

Here we would like to take the opportunity to highlight the unique system of peer review the NDB uses and give some information and background on how the NDB works.

AIM AND PURPOSE

The NDB Foundation published the first issue of NDB in 1967 under the auspices of the former Ministry of Social Affairs and Public Health. The *American Medical Letter on Drugs and Therapeutics* (1959) and the *British Drug and Therapeutic Bulletin* (1962) were used as models for the new journal.

The NDB Foundation publishes a monthly bulletin targeting everyone involved in the prescribing and provision of pharmaceuticals. Its purpose is to promote a more rational approach to pharmacotherapy and it strives to put the principals of 'evidence-based medicine' into practice. Furthermore, it aims to provide impartial information to counterbalance the enormous amounts of money the commercial sector spends on information for pharmaceutical

products. NDB makes every effort to protect its contents from any influence from the pharmaceutical industry or even the suspicion thereof. To guarantee its freedom, the bulletin is not financed by profit from advertising. This leaves the editors free to comment critically on issues such as new drugs, side effects and promotional activities.

DISTRIBUTION

Of each bulletin some 50,000 issues are printed and distributed to members of the Dutch medical association, dental association and that of pharmacists, as well as members of professional specialist associations. Furthermore, the bulletin is distributed to all medical students who are in the clinical training part of their study, and is available free of charge on the world wide web.

CONTENTS OF THE JOURNAL

The main article forms the basis of the NDB. It usually deals with a specific clinical condition, such as heart failure or vaginal infection. The creation of a new group of drugs at the time that a second competitor comes onto the market or specific problems that arise in the prescribing of drugs, such as side effects and interactions, may also be an indication for a review article.

STRUCTURE OF THE FOUNDATION

The Foundation has an editorial board and an advisory council, each with its own part to play. The editorial board is

responsible for the content of the journal. This is composed of seven people: general practitioners, pharmacists (both hospital-based and community) and several medical specialists. They meet monthly to discuss the ongoing publications. The editorial board is supported by an advisory council, which meets twice a year and has 17 members consisting of prescribing specialists, pharmacists, and general practitioners. The advisory council gives advice on the contents of the journal, policy concerning articles, choice of articles and also offers critical comments on each article. The preparatory and actual editorial work takes place in the editorial office, staffed by two scientific editors and three editorial assistants.

SOURCES OF LITERATURE

The NDB uses standard and consensus reports as its literature sources, providing these are available on the works in question. The consensus of opinion is, however, not always completely independent from the pharmaceutical companies, and standard works are sometimes in need of revision. For this reason NDB always tries to draw independent conclusions. To this end we use only trials which have been well structured and competently carried out and whose results have been published in journals that practice a system of peer review. In principle, NDB does not publish results gained from abstracts, posters, papers read at conferences, data on file and expert's reports, as this material has not been checked by independent reviewers. Only in cases where there is no source of reliable, published information whatsoever, will NDB use the less well-reviewed information. This is always pointed out explicitly in the article.

EDITORIAL PROCEEDINGS

The main articles are usually written by external authors at the request of the editorial board. In the interests of impartiality we endeavour to opt for authors who are not associated with any particular pharmaceutical company. The potential author (if necessary) is sent articles of the randomised, double-blind and controlled trials published on the subject in question. Reports of these trials are obtained by the editorial office by systematic search

operations in (mostly) the Medline, Embase and Cochrane libraries. Information is also obtained from, for instance, sister publications, review articles and textbooks.

The first draft received from the author(s) is checked on its content and adapted to the house-style by the editorial staff. The editors also look for uniform usage of medical terminology and literature listings, using the Vancouver style.

The version of the article thus created is then sent to the editorial board, the advisory council and to a minimum of five experts in the field (external referees) for peer review. A number of permanent referees are also asked for their views. These include representatives of the Farmacotherapeutisch Kompas (national formulary), the Dutch scientific associations of general practitioners and pharmacists, as well as professional specialist associations. This system ensures that every article is reviewed by at least 20 experts. The companies who make the products also get a chance to comment on the article. The name of the author is not printed on the draft article at this stage. The editorial office inventorises and considers the reviews of the article and then performs a further literature search. Suggestions on processing of reviews are laid before the editorial committee. At its monthly meetings, the committee decides which suggestions to submit to the author. The summarised and undesignated comments and text suggestions are then discussed with the author personally. The resulting second revised version of the article is returned to the referees and drug companies with an accompanying explanation of the revisions. They again have the chance to review and comment, should they wish to do so. It is only then, usually about six months after the delivery of the first draft, that the article is considered ready for publication. Sometimes, even more time is necessary. This is an inherently laborious process as it involves the opinions and arguments of many experts who all have the right to hear and be heard. The main articles are meant to serve as guides for a number of years.

The article by M.E.R. Gomes and Professor F.W.A. Verheugt is the first from NDB to be included in the *Netherlands Journal of Medicine* and underlines very well the quality of the peer-review process of NDB.

More information can be found on www.geneesmiddelenbulletin.nl.