

50 years *Netherlands Journal of Medicine*

The next 10 years: 1986-1995

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In 1982, when my predecessor Leo Offerhaus asked me to join the editorial board of the Netherlands Journal of Medicine, I became acquainted with a small group of eager and enthusiastic internists who at that time were responsible for the Journal. The editor was called the 'managing editor' to illustrate the fact that it was he who really managed the Journal. The board members (who were then called the 'editors') met at regular intervals at Offerhaus' home (with coffee and cake!) to comment on new manuscripts and to discuss new ways of improving the Journal's standard. There were no formal rules, and decisions were taken in a friendly atmosphere. Especially during the winter months, however, travelling to the managing editor's house was not always easy and sometimes we got stuck in heavy snowstorms (global warming was not heard of then). The poor editor-in-chief could do nothing but wait and see if anyone would appear. There was no way of knowing who would show up and who would not, as nobody had a cellular phone in those days.

By the end of 1984, Offerhaus was facing new challenges which forced him to delegate some of the editor's work to a younger colleague and so I became 'assistant managing editor', at that time a new phenomenon at the Journal. We were lucky enough to witness an increased submission rate of good manuscripts which made it possible to publish the Journal on a monthly basis. After a risky endeavour in 1981, when it was decided to increase the number of issues from six to ten a year,¹ it was easier for us to move to a monthly publication as of 1985. When this was accomplished, Offerhaus resigned and I took over his position in January 1986. The implication was that, for the first time in the history of the Journal, the editor was not based in Amsterdam but in Rotterdam.

It was a time for change. The term 'managing editor' was abandoned and replaced simply by 'editor' to denote the editor-in-chief. The editorial board was reshaped

and two associate editors were appointed to assist the editor-in-chief: Edo Meinders, who was on the verge of moving from Arnhem to Leiden, and No Vogten from Heemstede.² The former 'editors' were now collectively referred to as the editorial board. The three editors met every month in Utrecht or in one of their homes and the meetings of the full editorial board were limited to twice a year. The latter meetings always took place in the office of the *Nederlandsche Internisten Vereeniging* (NIV; the *Netherlands Association of Internal Medicine*) in Utrecht and were followed by dinner in 'De Kromme Elleboog'. The restaurant's name (but also the food) was particularly appreciated by Leo van der Putte who was our board member for rheumatology at the time.

The first year in office was full of challenging experiences. The most intriguing of these were the negotiations with the new publisher. For a number of reasons, it had become necessary to look for another publisher, a process that had already been started by Offerhaus in an attempt to professionalise the Journal. After many deliberations and thorough discussions with the Board of the NIV we finally chose Elsevier as our future publisher. The treasurer of the NIV had calculated that the transition to Elsevier would become a profitable venture in a few years time, although the expectations in this regard were not completely fulfilled. Judith Taylor at Elsevier was our liaison officer with whom we closely collaborated. She was instrumental in guiding the changeover from Bohn to Elsevier and in the development of new items. Besides the Netherlands Editorial Board we instituted an International Advisory Board in an attempt to make the Journal better known outside our own country. Fortunately, the number of manuscripts continued to rise and more original work found its way to the Journal. It enabled us to give the Journal a recognisable format with each issue containing an editorial, at least two original articles, a few brief reports and one or two reviews.

In January 1987, the first issue of the renewed Journal appeared. The layout had completely changed and the rather dark cover from the previous years had been replaced by a white cover with green lettering. The transition phase was accompanied by another major change. From that moment onwards, the Journal was no longer distributed exclusively in the Netherlands. Whereas the Dutch subscribers continued to receive their monthly edition, an international edition of the Journal was published bimonthly (with the articles of two issues combined, of course). This was also done to promote the Journal abroad.³ Naturally, not everybody appreciated the new look right from the start and it took some time before people became convinced of the appropriateness of these changes.

In the same period, Mrs Stijger resigned and most of the secretarial work now had to be done by the editors themselves. However, the personal computer was rapidly conquering the world and it became much easier to print and send out standard letters. Although this may sound rather trivial to young doctors who have literally grown up with a computer, for us in those days it was still a bit of an adventure. Moreover, many processes had not yet developed to today's standards. For instance, we started to work with WordPerfect 4.0[®] as the word processor which lacked many of the features of the current packages. For printing we had a choice of using either matrix printers or daisywheel printers. As the quality of the former was poor, we decided to use the daisywheel system. However, printing turned out to be a tedious job when you wanted to include different fonts or styles such as italics. It meant that you had to interrupt normal printing, replace the wheel containing normal letters by the one containing the italic letters and resume printing until the next format change. No wonder the turnaround time at the editorial office was still unacceptably long. It was not until the year 1991 that we could afford a modern laser printer which marked the beginning of a new era. Yolande te Giffel became the new secretary and she handled all office matters until the Journal moved to Utrecht in January 1996.

In retrospect, the 1986-1995 period turned out to be a crucial one. The decision to change publisher, the ambition to let the Journal grow with some outlook for internationalisation and the reshaping of the Journal into a modern periodical all proved to be necessary for the survival of the Journal. Of course, these developments also went with the loss of some tradition. In the old days the great internists of our country, the men of really great stature, were awarded a special issue of the Journal as a *liber amicorum*. This habit was formally abandoned in 1986 after the presentation of the last *liber amicorum* to Professor Mandema during the lustrum festivities of the NIV in Arnhem (*figure 1*).

Figure 1. Presentation by Dr de Leeuw (Editor-in-Chief) of the last *liber amicorum* (special issue of the Netherlands Journal of Medicine) to Professor Mandema in Arnhem (*Musis sacrum*) on 21 November 1986



REFERENCES

1. Offerhaus L. The Journal and its growing pains. *Neth J Med* 1985;28:1.
2. De Leeuw PW. At the start of a new era. *Neth J Med* 1986;29:1.
3. De Leeuw PW. A new jacket for the Journal. *Neth J Med* 1987;30:3-4.

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