

My Life as an Editor - Robert J Moots



Robert J Moots MD PhD,
Professor of Rheumatology
University of Liverpool, Editor in
Chief, *Rheumatology*

I trained in Medicine at St Mary's Hospital London (Imperial College), then after some junior hospital jobs in London moved to the Institute of Molecular Medicine at Oxford University to undertake an immunology PhD. Following that, I became Lecturer in Rheumatology at the University of Birmingham and thereafter a Research Fellow at Harvard Medical School, USA. I returned to the UK to take up an academic post in rheumatology at the University of Liverpool, and in 2002 was made full Professor of Rheumatology (the youngest person to be full professor and head of department in Rheumatology in the UK).

What are your main achievements as researcher and author?

Over the years, my research focus has changed from being a T Cell immunologist working on MHC/Peptide interactions to, on returning to the UK, identifying a new interest in innate immunity with a special focus on the role of neutrophils in rheumatic disease. It has been particularly satisfying to branch out into another form of research and I am delighted that this has proven so fruitful. However, the real credit for this lies with my Liverpool colleague, Professor Steven Edwards, a world authority in neutrophils who sold me the importance of studying them in rheumatic diseases with him. I am also involved in a broad spectrum of work focusing on inflammatory rheumatic diseases from bench to bedside including clinical trials and a drug discovery programme. I have published more than 100 papers.

When did you decide to be an editor?

I never expected to become editor of a journal. I applied for the post of Editor of *Rheumatology* because I was invited to do so and assumed that there probably weren't any other applications. I was rather shocked to hear, when appointed to the post, that there was an extremely strong field and I was fortunate to secure this position – but what it really involved I had little idea at the time!

Do your editorial responsibilities affect your work as a clinician and educator?

I believe that the journal enhances my ability to work as a clinician, perform research and educate others. One of the reasons for this is that I now see a whole spectrum of cutting-edge research, which places me in an ideal position to know far more about what is going on around the world than I had previously understood. On the other hand, the journal is constantly at the back of my mind in all my normal work, not least because I am constantly on the look out for potential topics for reviews, editorials and other such things.

What is the main function of a scholarly journal?

There are many different potential roles for journals, ranging from education to communicating pioneering research. There is a big misunderstanding over the quality of journals that, in a blinkered way, often focus on impact factor. Main functions of a scholarly journal should be to inform, educate, stimulate debate and be interesting.

I believe that *Rheumatology* is relevant to all people involved in rheumatic diseases, including students. In Liverpool, we train students to learn from appropriate sources, including journals. A journal publishing cutting-edge research together with state-of-the-art reviews, like *Rheumatology*, is of major relevance to medical students.

What is most challenging in the digital era of journal editing?

Online publication has improved journal accessibility and communication with readers. A lot of things have changed to accommodate this, including the business model for journals. We try to ensure that *Rheumatology* is at the forefront of new technology and have introduced podcasts - published both on the journal website and iTunes. The newer generation of researchers and clinicians will have been brought up with digital technology in the way that the older generation have not. Even at the simple level of having a Facebook presence, Twitter feeds and podcasts, we need to make sure that we can service the demands of this generation in the way that the paper journals did for their constituents in the past.

What do you find to be the benefits of membership of EASE and similar organisations?

The worst thing in publishing is to work in isolation. The ability to interact with others in similar positions is crucial for publishing, just as it is in all other forms of life. Bodies such as EASE and COPE provide important fora to raise and share problems and help ensure that there is a structured and supportive way to take things forward.

What are your plans for improving your journal?

Rheumatology is fortunate in having an extremely well committed and engaged international editorial board. Our associate editors are key leaders in rheumatology. Our editors meet regularly and, together, help drive forward the journal on different fronts, including increasing circulation and reaching out to the global scientific and rheumatologic communities.

Your advice to young Editors?

Young Editors, like me (!) should continue to strive to do the best for their journal. It is important to appreciate that you are not working in isolation: sharing with other editors can be very helpful - seek advice, suggestions and help where required. Similarly, it is important to ensure the core community that your journal serves supports your journal. Having a vision for development is crucial – but not to the exclusion of listening to sensible advice. There is a great future for medical and scientific publishing and this future lies in your hands!