

Letter

I was disappointed to read the article by Debra E Blakely¹ in the May-June issue of *Science Editor*. I have been a member of CSE for almost 10 years now, attending annual meetings and retreats, and have found CSE a very welcome home for editors outside the United States. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that CSE comes as close as any organization to being a truly international source of editorial expertise and center for debate. However, this article, describing the way in which scientific periodicals responded to the events of September 11, was not only embarrassingly incomplete but also indicative of a general trend in CSE, which makes some of your non-US supporters feel that their contributions are neither welcomed nor encouraged.

The Lancet endeavored to restructure completely its coverage of news and comment in the immediate aftermath of September 11. Not only did we report the essential and tragic facts of that day, but also we followed up with wide-ranging editorials about the implications of the September 11 attacks on international public health. Nowhere is this coverage, or that of other non-US medical journals, mentioned in the piece by Debra Blakely. I was surprised that during the peer-review process a wider and more inclusive context for the article on "Terrorism and Timeliness" was not sought. The impression given to your non-US readers is one of blissful isolationism—part of the wider political challenge that faces the United States since September 11.

But perhaps more important this incident symbolizes a potential strategic failure for CSE. At a time when science and medicine are ever more globalized, its organizations must adapt to that globalizing pro-

cess. CSE seems to be retreating into an American corner. Gone are the days at CSE meetings when medical editors from around the world, especially Europe, were an integral part of the annual meetings and retreats. Not only has the medical content of CSE declined, but also the international flavor of its gatherings. Indeed, the organization's increasing irrelevance to Europe and the rest of the world has led some of us to give up attending annual meetings. Here is the major motivation for the creation of the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME). The failure to continue the annual Airlie House retreats of several years ago has also been a major disappointment to some of us who have been concerned about the intellectual development of editing. There is now no opportunity to think in depth with colleagues about particular issues and develop policy about those issues. That function has been taken over by the increasingly excellent JAMA peer-review congresses.

The leadership of CSE during recent years has pursued a course that is difficult to understand. It has abandoned its role to WAME, JAMA peer-review congresses, and even that most elitist of organizations—the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors. If CSE turns away from its international colleagues, does it care if those international colleagues turn away from CSE?

Richard Horton
Editor
The Lancet

Reference

1. Blakely DE. Terrorism and timeliness: scientific periodicals respond to September 11. *Sci Ed* 2002;25(3):93-4.

In Reply

As president of the Council of Science Editors (CSE), I support the decision by Barbara Gastel, editor of *Science Editor*, to publish the article that has stimulated Horton's reply. As stated in CSE's editorial policy "Relations Between Editors and Their Publishers or Sponsoring Societies":

1. "The Editor has total responsibility, authority, and accountability for editorial content of the journal." That said, I understand Horton's disappointment in not having his journal included in the article, and I commend *The Lancet* for its substantive and timely coverage of September 11 and

its aftermath. However, I do not understand Horton's subsequent leap in logic. A single article published in an editorially independent journal in no way indicates or symbolizes a general trend or strategy on the part of the journal's owner, in this case CSE.

I agree with Horton that CSE is an "international source of editorial expertise". However, I disagree with his assertions that CSE may be failing its international members and that the Council is abandoning its role to other organizations.

Currently, 13% of CSE members are from outside the United States, where CSE was founded 45 years ago. The percentage of non-US members has ranged from 12% to 15% during the last 5 years, and the percentage of non-US attendees of the last 3 annual meetings has ranged from 9% to 13%. I hope to see the levels of international representation and volunteerism increase in response to the globalization of scientific communication; in recognition of the fact that many of us work for, in, and with international journals and organizations and multinational businesses; and as a result of CSE's strategic plan to broaden its membership.

Horton mentions the roles of other international organizations and efforts for editors. Of note, CSE has active formal representatives to international sister organizations, such as the European Association of Science Editors (EASE) and the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME). Those organizations have specific missions that complement the mission and work of CSE, and we will continue to work with them and other organizations to serve editors better.

The Peer Review Congress, organized by the editors of the *Journal of the American Medical Association* and the *British Medical Journal*, has a very specific objective: to

stimulate research in scientific publication. It was not designed to help foster the development of policy or to serve as an overall workshop or retreat for editors. CSE continues to provide a variety of venues for education, debate, and policy development, including specific sessions during each annual meeting, annual short courses for editors, editorial policies, guidelines, and the work of the recent Authorship Taskforce, as well as three publications that are circulated to or accessed by editors throughout the world: *Science Editor*, the CSE Web site, and CSE's style manual, *Scientific Style and Format*. In addition, plans are under way for two future retreats; the advisory board for a retreat on scientific misconduct, planned for the fall of 2003, includes international representatives who are leaders in this area.

All those programs and services are provided with membership fees that do not fully cover the costs and are therefore supplemented by other non-dues sources of revenue, and they depend on the spirit of volunteerism and leadership of CSE's members. I invite all members, regardless of their location or vocation, to take a more active role in the Council.

I thank Horton for reminding readers of the importance of CSE and for the opportunity to comment on the Council's international relevance, positioning, and opportunities. CSE's mission and purpose are not bound by geographic boundaries or scientific discipline, but we can certainly do much to further our understanding of the needs of all science editors and to continue our efforts to serve editors wherever they reside.

Annette Flanagin

President, CSE

Director, JAMA Programs and

International Activities

Coordinator, Peer Review Congress

Reference

1. Council of Science Editors. Relations between editors and their publishers or sponsoring societies. *Sci Ed* 2002;25(6):186.

My thanks to Richard Horton for his thought-provoking letter. As perhaps should have been clearer, the feature article "Terrorism and Timeliness" by *Science Editor* fellow Debra E Blakely was intended not as an exhaustive account but rather as a brief overview illustrated by some examples. The examples included efforts of *Nature* and several US publications of various types in science and medicine. I appreciate Horton's calling attention to efforts of *The Lancet*, and I commend these efforts and those of other publications not mentioned specifically in this relatively brief article.

Along with striving to provide more articles on editing in fields other than biology and medicine, *Science Editor* has been working hard to include articles on internationally oriented topics and include authors from various countries. I hope that results of these efforts are becoming apparent. Clearly, involvement by non-US members, such as Horton, is crucial to making *Science Editor* a truly international publication. I hope that he and others from around the world will increasingly assist us in this regard.

Barbara Gastel

Editor

Science Editor