

Passing on the Editor-in-Chief baton at the *Medical Journal of Australia*

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“There is a Chinese curse which says ‘May he live in interesting times’. Like it or not, we live in interesting times. They are times of danger and uncertainty; but they are also the most creative of any time in the history of mankind.” — Robert F Kennedy, 1966

As we continue to live through the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change pressures including floods and fires, anti-vaccine rhetoric, anti-science sentiments and war in Ukraine, the words of Robert F Kennedy over 50 years ago ring true. Despite all the uncertainty, science and medicine have made tremendous strides in an unprecedented fashion, as exemplified by the very rapid development, testing and delivery of life-saving vaccines for SARS-CoV-2. The past 2 years of the pandemic have reinforced how important high quality peer-reviewed medical journals are as a trusted source of the best available information, in order to guide public health and the safe and effective practice of medicine.¹ I am very proud of the role of the *Medical Journal of Australia* throughout the pandemic in publishing living guidelines, new research and evidence-based viewpoints that have helped shape Australia’s response.^{1,2}

In 2015, I took over the reins of the *MJA* as Editor-in-Chief at a very difficult time in the over 100-year history of the Journal, as was widely reported in the press.³ My official start began with the December 2015 Christmas issue, featuring James Bond on the cover and my first editorial as Editor-in-Chief.^{4,5} My wife and my mother, my harshest critics, thought the cover was a blast! The Journal quickly bounced back as the editorial team and the Editorial Advisory Group were refreshed, and internal and external processes were streamlined and strengthened.⁶ Now after three contract renewals and several years in the job, it is time to pass the baton on to a new Editor-in-Chief by the end of this year.

It has been a tremendous privilege to lead the Journal. The *MJA* over my time has transitioned from print to digital, enhanced open access, introduced a high quality preprint service, changed publishing partners, introduced a partnership on climate change and health with the *Lancet*, and saw its impact (and impact factor, now 7.74) skyrocket, reflecting the excellence of what it publishes.^{1,2,6,7} The *MJA* joined the Asia Pacific Association of Medical Editors, and I had the opportunity to visit the best journals in the world including *The Lancet*, the *New England Journal of Medicine*, *The BMJ*, *Annals of Internal Medicine*, *JAMA* and the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* to benchmark our processes, discuss the future of medical journals, and see first-hand how articles are handled by other editorial teams. I can assure readers, authors and reviewers that the *MJA* standards are among the highest in the world.

I also had the pleasure of being introduced to Twitter as the Editor-in-Chief. I doubt I would ever have dared venture into this social media cauldron where some people (including professionals) feel they can say anything they like, including throwing insults and threats meant to intimidate. However, I have learnt social



media can also be a source of reliable information (as long as you know the source and can verify the facts) and positive influence. My tweets remain my personal reflections and opinions, not the opinion of the *MJA* or the Australian Medical Association. I thank all my Twitter followers, and plan to remain on the platform in a personal capacity after I hand over the baton (@Prof_NickTalley). I hope you will continue to follow me.

Being the Editor-in-Chief of a major general medical journal is hugely exciting and stimulating. You are exposed early on to the latest ideas and information, and every day is educational and interesting. It is also a very challenging time in terms of journal business models, competition, predatory journals and the transition to open access. If you are an experienced medical practitioner or health professional with strong clinical research skills including an excellent publication record, a deep knowledge of clinical medicine and public health, an interest or expertise in medical education, methodological expertise in clinical epidemiology and biostatistics, excellent written and oral communication abilities, and leadership experience (as well as journal editing experience), and if you value upholding the highest standards of medical and scientific integrity, advancing health and equity, and protecting editorial independence, the job may be perfect for you!

Once the new Editor-in-Chief is appointed, by the end of the year, I will look forward to introducing them to the readers of the *MJA* and working with the Editor-in-Chief over a transition period. I have been invited by the Board to stay on as Emeritus Editor-in-Chief of the *MJA* after the new appointment begins, which I have agreed to do. After stepping down, I plan to continue my National Health and Medical Research Council-funded research as a Leadership Fellow, practise medicine, prepare new editions of my textbooks, teach and write more, and hopefully spend a bit more time with family and friends.

I want to thank all the readers, peer reviewers and Editorial Advisory Group members for their support since 2015. I also want to thank my outstanding team of deputy medical

editors, structural editors and administrative support, and the Executive General Manager, senior management and Board of the Australasian Medical Publishing Company (a wholly owned subsidiary of the Australian Medical Association), the parent company which publishes the *MJA*.

Competing interests: A complete list of disclosures is available at <https://www.mja.com.au/journal/staff/editor-chief-professor-nick-talley>. ■

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