

## MAKING SCIENCE MATTER

## COUNCIL OF SCIENCE EDITORS MEETING

Baltimore, April 29–May 3, 2011

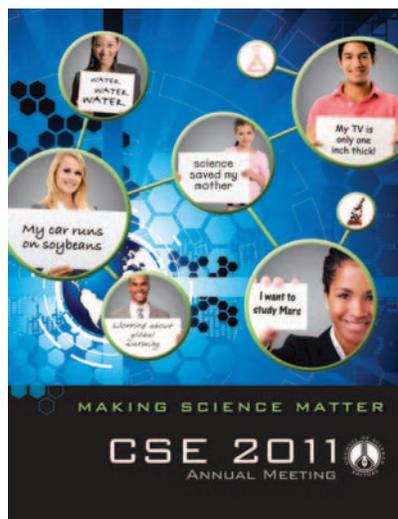
What do 400 editors, managing editors, publication managers, copy editors, and publishers talk about when they meet? For the second year in a row, I attended the annual meeting of the Council of Science Editors (CSE), held this year in Baltimore, USA. The Council of Science Editors, founded in 1957, was formerly the Council of Biological Sciences Editors, and its membership of 1200 is still made up predominantly of life sciences and biological sciences editors. But there is a will to expand to include all the physical sciences. Tangible evidence of this desire is the recent election of Ken Heideman, Director of Publications at the American Meteorological Society ([www.ametsoc.org](http://www.ametsoc.org)), as president-elect of CSE.

Immediately preceding each meeting is a series of short courses, and last year I attended the two-day short course for journal editors. At first, I felt like an alien who had landed on another planet, but I rapidly adjusted to the new atmosphere and the different alphabet soup of acronyms. I was fascinated to learn that leading journals in the medical sciences have impact factors as high as 50 and acceptance rates as low as 6%. Many medical journals have their acceptance-to-publication period down to 2 months, and 6 to 8 months is the norm. Bill Lanier, editor-in-chief of *Mayo Clinic Proceedings*, shared how he actively seeks high-quality submissions for his journal at conferences and by surveying the literature. Arthur Hilliker, editor of *Genome*, reminded us that “there is someone’s blood and sweat in every paper,” hence the need to treat authors courteously.

Ethical issues loom large in the biomedical field (and increasingly in all fields) (e.g. plagiarism, conflict of interest, authorship). Should editors publish in their own journal? If they do, there should be a fail-safe system to prevent their handling their own work. In most medical journals, each author must list his or her contribution to the paper, and all authors must state their sources of funding. The review process typically includes a review by a statistician to ensure the validity of the statistical analysis typical of many medical papers, and many of the heavyweight journals, like *Circulation* and *JAMA*, have a statistician on staff who reviews the statistical data in every paper. Not every paper is necessarily sent through the review process. If the editor-in-chief feels that the paper is not novel enough for his journal, he will simply tell the authors right away and encourage them to submit to a “niche” journal. Even though most attendees at the CSE meeting are in the medical or biological field, I can warmly recommend the short course for journal editors to anyone taking on the editorship of a journal. This is a quick way to be brought up to speed on many issues an editor might face, and it provides an instantaneous network.

The meeting format is as follows: one plenary talk and 3 breakout sessions 60 or 90 minutes long on a given topic. In line with the theme of the 2011 meeting, “Making Science Matter,” the plenary talks dealt with various outreach efforts. Dr. John Whyte, Chief Medical Officer of the Discovery Channel, encouraged us to present science in an entertaining manner. Darlene Cavalier ([www.sciencecheerleader.com](http://www.sciencecheerleader.com)) gave a wonderful talk illustrating how one person can make a difference. The third talk was by Keith Baggerly of the Anderson Cancer Center on the subject of forensic bioinformatics; he related the five-year saga that led to the retraction of the article “Genomic Signature to Guide the Use of Therapeutics” in *Nature Medicine* (12: 1294-1300). When this paper was published in 2006, researchers at the Anderson Cancer Center got really excited and wanted to start using genomic signatures as a tool to fine-tune treatment of their patients. However when they started reviewing the data, Dr. Baggerly and his colleagues could not replicate the results. Dr. Baggerly argues that authors should make freely and readily accessible the data, algorithms and other information that are central or integral to the publication.

For every time slot (1 or 1.5 hours), there are three concurrent sessions to choose from, and each session has from 1 to 4 presenters. Some of the sessions are very practical: “Word Tips for Editors” is always a popular one, I am told. Among other sessions I attended: “How to Build a Better Style Guide,” “What Editors Can Do to Detect Scientific Misconduct,” “Seeking and Using Reader Feedback to Improve Your Journal,” “Conducting an Editor-in-Chief Search,” and “Media Outreach: Tips for Getting Attention in a Wired World.” The many sessions on social media were extremely well attended. Even though the explosion of social media can seem overwhelming (blogs, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, podcasts, wikis, chatrooms, etc.), Brian Reid encouraged everyone to start small: in just 8 minutes a day, you can have some presence, he argued. Following this bit of advice, I have since started a Facebook page for *Elements* ([www.facebook.com/elementsmagazine](http://www.facebook.com/elementsmagazine)). Societies who have committed to using social media have been able to attract more traffic to their journal. Once you have a presence on Facebook and Twitter, you have to post and tweet regularly, though.



The Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), established in 1997, has over 6000 members worldwide from all academic fields. It has a wealth of information on its website ([www.publicationethics.org](http://www.publicationethics.org)) and can also provide advice to editors and publishers on publication ethics. The Committee on Ethics of the CSE has published a white paper on promoting integrity in scientific journal publication ([www.councilscienceeditors.org/files/public/entire\\_whitepaper.pdf](http://www.councilscienceeditors.org/files/public/entire_whitepaper.pdf)). Both groups teamed up to present the fascinating session “What Can Editors

Do to Deter and Detect Scientific Misconduct?” Everyone involved in the publication process has a role to play in detecting misconduct.

Other resources for authors I learned about are the EQUATOR Network ([www.equator-network.org](http://www.equator-network.org)), an international initiative that seeks to improve the reliability and value of medical research literature by promoting transparent and accurate reporting of research studies, and the International Society of Medical Publication Professionals compilation of best practises. It is available in an author’s toolkit for article submission “A Practical Guide to Getting your Research Published” (<http://informahealthcare.com/doi/pdf/10.1185/03007995.2010.499344>). This paper would be of great interest to any new researcher venturing into publication.

Breaks provided an opportunity to network and visit the exhibits: this year many exhibitors offered English editing services for English-as-a-second-language authors. This is a good place to shop for online submission systems, printers, editorial services, etc.

If you are involved in a society and grappling with the future of publishing, you will find a wealth of information at a Council of Science Editors meeting. Next year’s meeting will be in Seattle, Washington, USA (18–21 May 2012). Many of the 2010 presentations are available online at [www.councilscienceeditors.org/](http://www.councilscienceeditors.org/).

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