

Nicotine and Tobacco Research: past, present and future

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I am delighted and honoured to be writing my first Editorial as Editor in Chief of N&TR, having spent a period of time observing journal practices and procedures, readying myself for the task ahead, learning from my esteemed colleague, current Editor in Chief, Marcus Munafò and working alongside our highly experienced Editorial Board and Editorial Manager. As a field, we are indebted to Professor Munafò for his guardianship and leadership of our valued society journal through times of critical change in our field, including changing rates of smoking prevalence, emergence of new nicotine containing products, and the unprecedented public health crisis of the covid-19 global pandemic. His firm commitment to open science, methodological triangulation, robust scientific reporting, and equality, diversity and inclusion, are unifying aspects of the journal that I will transparently uphold and strive to continually achieve.

Nicotine and Tobacco Research (N&TR), was established as the journal of the Society for Research on Nicotine and Tobacco in 1999. Following discussions with the SRNT Board, Ovide Pomerleau and Gary E. Swan (founding Editor) developed a prospectus for a new journal, for the peer-reviewed publication of research focused exclusively on the multidisciplinary science of nicotine and tobacco(1). The first Editorial published by N&TR discussed the importance of interdisciplinarity in addressing the complexity of nicotine addiction – as vital then as it is now: ‘it is in no one's best interest to continue the pursuit of unidimensional answers to a multidimensional problem. Since research in this area has grown to a remarkable degree, both in scientific complexity and in social and economic importance, there is a clear need for a publication that can encourage integrative thinking and promote interdisciplinary communication’(2). In its first full year of operation, N&TR received 125 papers for review. In that year, approximately 23.5% of adults in the US were current smokers(3). Approximately ten years later, in 2008, the Oxford University Press took over as N&TR's publisher, leading to better journal support and promotion. In that same year the World Health Organisation (WHO) began reporting estimates of the prevalence of tobacco smoking for all countries in the first report on the global tobacco epidemic. At this time, current smoking prevalence in the US had declined to 20.6% (3) but globally rates remained much higher. By 2025, the WHO projects total global rates of tobacco smoking prevalence to fall to 17.3% for both sexes combined(3) – a rate not markedly less than that of the US some 20 years previously. Despite declines in tobacco smoking prevalence in high income countries, it is a sobering fact that approximately 1 in 5 men and 1 in 20 women in the global adult population today continues to smoke tobacco(3). Reducing prevalence in the West masks continued high prevalence in low-and middle-income countries. Clearly, given the deadly nature of tobacco smoking, there is an urgent and continued need for robust science to address this global health crisis.

Marcus Munafò took over from his predecessor, David Balfour, in 2015 (4). At that time, the journal received 700 submissions annually. The January Edition of N&TR in 2015 contained articles on smoking cessation, waterpipe use and varenicline. No articles addressed e-cigarettes, which were then still an emerging consumer phenomenon. Since that time, the landscape of smoking cessation support has changed considerably with the widespread use of nicotine containing e-cigarettes, and new forms of nicotine replacement therapy coming to the attention of researchers. There has been a surge in trials and other study designs monitoring uptake, evaluating effectiveness for smoking cessation, and assessing relative and absolute harms of these products. In the last year, the journal has received 900 submissions, many of which focus on new forms of nicotine replacement as smoking cessation treatment.

In an editorial in 2003, Gary Swan, reflecting on the need for timely dissemination of research findings, wrote that, “In the best scenario, the evidence that we publish in N&TR would *anticipate* the refinements in product development emanating from the tobacco industry and would be in the field in time to help users who could become dependent on these products”(5). A noble, if ambitious aim, but one that we should strive towards as a field as we embrace new forms of academic publishing, increase open access to the science, enable timely dissemination and, ultimately, aim to realise benefit to the public.

The future for N&TR throws up many likely challenges. In the field, addressing tobacco use in low-and-middle income countries and supporting the publication of science from these countries in a cost-effective and accessible way is a key concern. Responding to fast-changing patterns of use of alternative nicotine containing products is a continual challenge, as industry evolves at an extremely fast pace. In publishing, we see a proliferation of academic journals, both within the field of nicotine research and more broadly, offering immediate online publication with open peer review. There are challenges for our peer review model, as capacity of colleagues is stretched by increasing numbers of requests for peer review. These are issues that we will address head on as we move forwards to further strengthen the place of N&TR as the leading specialist journal in our field.

I, in common with those who have gone before me, maintain commitment to publishing the highest quality science and supporting speedy dissemination to scientific, clinical, and lay communities. I also intend to champion clear, consistent and neutral terminology, utilising ontologies where possible. I will lead the journal to support the publication of research that prioritises the voices of people who use nicotine and tobacco products, and focuses research efforts on the populations most in need of support to stop smoking. This includes nicotine and tobacco research encompassing all methodological approaches, from basic science, to clinical, policy and public health, supporting the dissemination of diverse scientific findings advancing our understanding of the impact of nicotine and tobacco in all of its forms. I am indebted to the Board of Deputy Editors and the dedicated group of Associate Editors that serve the journal, and look forward with anticipation to addressing future challenges and changes to the field.

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