

Information Sharing

Timothy Rowe, MB, BS, FRCOG, FRCSC

Editor-in-Chief

"The present lasts no time; the future does not exist; and the past is... past"

- Aristotle

I try not to get too sensitive about what this journal is and what it does. Having been involved with its production for quite some time, I have vaguely paternal feelings about its regular appearance and the way it is viewed by its readership. But it is, after all, simply a vehicle through which people express ideas and respond to the ideas of others. Not really worth any serious reflection.

Then, on a weekend in early June, our Editorial Offices were broken into by persons unknown. The area of the hospital where our offices are housed is nominally secure, but apparently insufficiently so at 3 o'clock in the morning. The motive of the perpetrators remains unclear—they broke into adjacent offices as well, rifling files but taking nothing of value—and when the dust settled, only one thing was missing. The only item they took was the portable hard drive that provided back-up of journal files, which had been put away but not locked away. This hard drive did in fact contain some unique journal files.

Trying to explain to the police what the Journal is, what the functions of the Editorial Offices are, and what motivation anyone would have for stealing the files was an interesting exercise. The police, trained as they are to see motivation in anything, wondered if the files had been stolen by a rival journal in an act of industrial sabotage. Hadn't there been trouble of some kind at another Canadian medical journal? We quickly dismissed this, although I think the police remained unconvinced. It seemed most likely that the hard drive was the most easily portable booty that came to hand, and that its contents were immaterial to the thieves. If this is so, some lucky owner of a nearly-new portable hard drive has likely puzzled over the arcane information found on it before deleting. And if this is also true, then a small portion of the Journal's history is gone forever from our offices. All

of the print versions of the Journal will survive, but some of the pre-publication activities (reviewers' comments, authors' responses, editing changes) have been lost.

As with all victims of theft, we are left wondering what happened to our lost item. Did someone actually preserve the files somewhere? Did they print them out, to circulate and read with their friends? Did they understand them? If they have simply been deleted, should we say that the information is really gone? And how important is such information anyway? Can it be used by anyone else? Without getting too metaphysical, where is this information now?

In this issue of the Journal, Gideon Koren and colleagues add to our knowledge about congenital abnormalities and the factors associated with their occurrence and their prevention. Their meta-analysis of the effects of prenatal supplementation with folate-fortified multivitamin preparations on congenital abnormalities uses the information from a variety of human studies to show the protective effects of these preparations on neural tube defects, cardiovascular abnormalities, and limb defects. The supplements have effects on other congenital abnormalities as well. Nothing metaphysical here: this is solid, reliable, practical and important new information for women and their care-givers everywhere.

With the Journal's ability to disseminate information as important as this, it is hard not to feel a frisson of pride in being associated with what the Journal does. Perhaps that does generate recognition that the Journal is more than just a monthly collection of pages, but instead is something with a character and a soul to go with its words and pictures. And then when people who don't respect that come in the middle of the night and carry a part of it away, we can feel a sense of loss, even though nothing about the Journal has really changed. Or maybe I should just get over it.