

Book Review

A Surgeon's Guide to Writing and Publishing

Eds. Schein M, Farndon JR, Fingerhut A.
Publ. tfm publishing Ltd.
ISBN 1-903378-01-X. Price £25. pp 288

This book has been well publicised recently, with flyers in most surgical journals. A catchy title and the prospect of a free copy prompted a request for a review copy. This soft-back book is, truly, as the publisher's claim, 'all you ever wanted to know about publishing, but never dared to ask'. While drawing heavily on their expertise with the *British Journal of Surgery*, the editors have produced an invaluable manual for budding authors in all surgical specialities . . . and beyond!

There are several books on interpretation of the literature, but few guides to contributing to published knowledge (reasonably as we will all spend more time reading than writing). The best known to date, Huth's 'How to write and Publish Papers in the Medical Sciences' is more a reference book and less easy reading.

A glance at the contents should attract our readership. Titles such as 'Why should a surgeon publish?', 'What an editor wants or expects from authors' or 'Dealing with the rejected article' provide valuable advice to the senior literati or the threatened UK species, the post Calman trainee who still wants to publish quality papers. An excellent feature of each

chapter is a lengthy commentary appendix. The editors are not afraid to apply peer review to their own product and some commentaries are commendably critical. That on Chapter 1, 'Why Publish?', for example stresses that a far more important issue is 'Why not to publish'!! Production of any paper is at the expense of clinical time and dilutes the literature evidence base. Another chapter's advice is dismissed as 'over-simplistic'. The Impact Factor is both lauded and then rejected. A little controversy makes for a very entertaining read.

There is an encouraging chapter for the foreign author, suggesting that jargon is a worse sin than a few grammatical errors. Contemporary UK authors will be relieved to hear that submission of a completed chapter up to three months late is quite acceptable. Professor Gleeson may be dismayed to learn that one can automatically add six months to the publication date of any book . . . seems optimistic for Scott Brown Vol VII.

There is little, inevitable, repetition in this multi-author work. All seem agreed that the case report is dead, that the elusive important new idea is vital and that the paper journal is doomed. If so, the trees felled for this copy were sacrificed for an excellent read on a London Day Return. Highly recommended to the novice or expert author, this was read in a few hours but will be studied for years.

LIAM M FLOOD FRCS
North Riding Infirmary