
My Life as an Editor



Hervé Maisonneuve, MD (herve.maisonneuve@yahoo.fr) was President of EASE from 1994 to 1997, and Chief Editor of ESE from 2000 to 2006. In 2004 Hervé was awarded honorary membership of EASE. We asked Hervé some questions about his long career in science editing.

ESE: What is your present job title?

HM: I have held the position of part-time associate professor of public health, School of Medicine, Paris Sud 11, since 2009, and have started consultancy activities in various scientific domains.

ESE: How do you spend your working day?

HM: My time is currently divided. One day a week at I manage a new diploma at the School of Medicine supported by the Sarkozy Alzheimer plan 2008-2012. The objective is to build a national network of clinical researchers in order to increase their participation in multinational trials. As editor of *La Presse Médicale* (the leading French Elsevier journal for hospital doctors), one day a week I review and select articles, copy-edit original papers, and help authors to improve poor papers. I regularly teach medical writing in French hospitals; I have short-term WHO missions in Africa, where I lead courses for civil servants from the public health bodies, on drug development and management processes (authorizing a trial, controlling good practices, conducting an audit). This new life makes me happy; it is a far cry from the huge multinational companies that are both exciting and difficult to understand.

ESE: What was your previous role, and why did you decide to move on?

HM: I recently left Pfizer in Paris, having spent four years as head of continuing medical education and scientific media. I left the company as they fired 40% of employees in 2009, and suggested that the older ones among us should retire (I am 59 and never planned to retire early!).

ESE: Tell us something about your career history.

HM: My 30-year career has been unusual: I spent half of my time in the drug industry, and the other half in public organizations (public hospitals, national agencies, not-for-profit associations). I was happy in both worlds and cannot say where the grass is greener. However, the behaviour of people is amazing when they cannot accept that these two worlds (public and private) have their advantages and drawbacks. I have met exceptional people and crooks in both worlds.

ESE: How did the editorial part of your career begin?

HM: During my internship I got a position on the editorial committee of a regional journal, *Les Cahiers Médicaux Lyonnais*. In 1977, articles on medical writing from J A Farfor, a former *BMJ* editor, were published. He tried to educate French opinion leaders and taught in Paris

after he retired from the *BMJ*. After the publication of 10 of Farfor's papers, we received correspondence from readers who were concerned that by publishing articles on medical writing the editorial board was losing space for clinical topics in the journal. Farfor wrote an aggressive but realistic editorial expressing the opinion that teaching medical writing to French leaders was useless, as a common French practice was to use the style of Victor Hugo or Marcel Proust. Thirty years later the situation has not changed!

ESE: What was the next step?

HM: In 1984, I joined the editorial board of *La Presse Médicale*. The chief editor was an old surgeon convinced that good medicine existed only in Paris. I have anecdotes of that time: once I explained to this chief editor that the statistics in a paper were muddled. He answered "But the style is good, it is written by Professor X" and so we must accept it. Another time we received evidence that data in a paper had been stolen from another scientist. The editorial decision was to calm both authors but not to disclose the theft to the readers!

ESE: Have you written any books about editing?

HM: Medical writing has never been taught at French medical schools; in 2009 fewer than five people teach irregularly in France: the French know how to write and cannot learn these methods. In 1988, I co-authored a book (*La rédaction médicale*) that is still successful and soon will publish the 5th edition. In 2000, I wrote a small book for interns (*Le guide du thésard*) that was widely circulated by a pharmaceutical company; a total of five editions were published.

ESE: When you look back to your time with EASE, what are your thoughts?

HM: I have a lot of good memories of EASE, and regularly read the journal and attend conferences. I enjoy the networking activities and always learn more about editing. I feel that I failed in not being successful in attracting French scientists to join EASE! But I was happy to transform the old bulletin into an informative journal, and I am very happy to see that young editors are now involved in the EASE journal.

ESE: Now that you are less involved with EASE, how do you fill your "spare editorial time"?

HM: I am involved with an international society for medical education (www.game-cme.org) and recently invited Richard Smith and Fiona Godlee to speak at a congress in Lyon. Having editors speak to educators was a great success for both parties! We must share experiences between disciplines for the benefit of all of us. Besides this, I spend about an hour each day to find news for my blog (*La Rédaction Médicale*, www.h2mw.eu), where you can exercise your knowledge of the French language: please come and comment.

Part of my spare time is now filled by my two grandchildren (three very soon) and my wife, as we like to enjoy the mountains and various artistic activities.