

Retrospective Thoughts on the Twenty-first Anniversary of the Inception of the Epidemiology Bulletin

Wen-Fei Lin · Li-Hui Tang · Shu-Kuan Lai · Hsiu-Lan Liu

Hsu-mei Hsu, Shang-Bang Wu, Bi-Zhen Pan, Jun-Jie Wu, and Shih-Yan Yan (There were no specific editorial personnel before December 1985. It was the trainees of the FETP who took turns to assemble the materials.)

Wen-Fei Lin: Chief Editor from December 1985 to December 1987.

Ling-Zhen Jian: Chief Editor from July 1989 to July 1990 (She is no longer with us).

Li-Hui Tang: Chief Editor from July 1990 to July 1999.

Shu-Kuan Lai: Chief Editor from August 1999 to March 2003.

Mei-ju Chen: Chief Editor from April 2003 to July 2003.

Hsiu-Lan Liu: Chief Editor from March 2003 to the present (except the four months specified above).

All above editors except Ling-Zhen Jian are still working for the Taiwan CDC.

The very first issue of this periodical, the Epidemiology Bulletin, was published on February 15, 1984. It was originally a rather miniature brainchild produced through practical efforts of the former Bureau of Communicable Disease Control (BCDC), one of the three former subordinate organizations under the Department of Health (DOH) that later combined and reorganized into the present day Center for Disease Control (Taiwan CDC) in July 1999. After that humble start, time seemed to fly, and suddenly we are now celebrating its twenty-first anniversary. The objective in initiating such a publication was to hopefully provide domestic healthcare workers at all levels with timely

information on issues and official policies of disease control and public health concerns of current importance. It was then decided it would be published monthly on the fifteenth of each month, and the main subject matter of its content would not just be limited to communicable diseases. Therefore, in addition to investigative reports of outbreaks and the ongoing disease spread of communicable diseases, its content touched on all sorts of public health issues, such as views on the effects of smoking on health, transportation accidents, and even occupational disease surveys.

In 1990, Dr. Bo-Ya Chang became Director General of the DOH. Thinking that the Epidemiology Bulletin should be much improved in its academic outlook, she ordered a complete revision of the Bulletin's editorial concept and style using the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR) prepared by CDC of the United States as a model to follow. The actual reconstruction started with the establishment of a new editorial committee assembled by the then Deputy Director General of the DOH, Dr. Ing-Lin Chen. The chief official of the Communicable Disease Control Bureau was given the responsibility as the principal editor of the magazine, while the deputy chief official of the BCDC, plus two deputy directors one each from the National Institute of Preventive Medicine (NIPM), and the National Quarantine Service (NQS) were appointed making up the three members of the committee. Besides, a four-member executive editorial team was formed, which consisted of a section head of the bureau, the chief of the Outbreak Division of NQS with one section head under him, and the director of the Field Epidemiology Training Program (FETP) of the DOH. The editorial committee convened and formulated a work guideline for them to follow. First, this guideline stipulated that the committee should meet each month, mainly to finalize the next issue. In addition, they

gradually drew up some regulations for quality improvements such as drafting a set of instructions for authors, a guide for reviewers, and shifting more weight onto the subject of disease outbreaks both in this country and abroad. The outcome was two-fold. The magazine improved in its readability and also enabled the front line disease-prevention personnel to grasp the epidemiological state of affairs more readily.

Beginning after this reform, each monthly issue published was set at a standard eight-page format. Besides two to three rather short epidemiology reports, the last two pages were devoted to a table of numbers of “Cases of Notifiable Diseases” which occurred in each municipality and county across Taiwan the previous month. Generally speaking, it turned out to be a rather concise little pamphlet, adequately employing simple but professional analyses and terminology in the field of epidemiology and biostatistics. It is said to be one of the best reference models of the combination of theory and practicality for healthcare workers. Later, due to a steady increase in the number of quality articles from outside sources accepted by the improved Bulletin, plus two new additions of the magazine featuring a summary of worldwide epidemics of interest to us and a trend diagram graph based on the recent results of diagnostic analyses of domestically collected specimens, the volume of each issue has expanded greatly into the present day seventy to eighty pages for the Chinese version, and thirty to forty pages for the English version.

The reason we mention above “articles from outside sources” is that originally the main function of this improved magazine was to provide a more reliable publishing opportunity for the trainees of the FETP as they were sent to various places in Taiwan to practice their newly acquired skills conducting field

epidemiological studies and eventually writing up reports. So the two or three articles carried in each of those early issues were mostly epidemiology reports about certain local outbreaks of communicable diseases. The early stage standard procedure before publication was that Dr. Malison, the former American advisor of the FETP would first help select a few suitable reports submitted by the trainees. Having been proofread by some experts and approved by the chief official of the BCDC through the regular administration process, the articles would be translated into English by Dr. Malison himself to form the English edition. As to the statistics table of case numbers, it was dealt with by a colleague. The tenth of every month was the final date for all editorial work to be completed. After that, the finished manuscripts, both in Chinese and English, were sent to The United Daily News for typesetting along with a list of readers with local and international mailing addresses. The newspaper publisher was responsible for the completion of three further rounds of proofreading, having it printed in time, and sent out punctually on the fifteenth of the month. In order to broaden its scope and content to accommodate many other communicable disease-related issues and accounts, the Chinese version of the Bulletin today does not limit itself to those reports of epidemiology studies written by FETP trainees. In addition, articles about laboratory analysis results, discussions on health education, or government health policies are also accepted. However, that is only in the case of the Chinese version but not the English version, i.e. the articles appearing in the English version today to a large extent still adhere to the native epidemiology survey reports. That explains why the more recent Chinese version of Bulletin is about twice the size of its English counterpart.

It's interesting to note here that the beautiful calligraphic writing of the four Chinese characters in the title appearing repeatedly on the cover of each and

every issue of the Chinese version ever since the very first published monthly, was composed by Mr. Hsin-Tung Wu, a former employee who then worked at the Secretarial Office of the DOH. Mr. Wu is a traditional scholar type of gentleman, very warm hearted and pleasant. According to the information we have, he is more than eighty years old today.

The Epidemiology Bulletin has gone through several memorable turning points as well as modifications over the past two decades. First of all, in July 1985 the circulation volume of its Chinese version increased to 10,000 copies due to a move of the publisher to send a complimentary copy to every individual physician working at each teaching hospital in Taiwan. At the same time, the content of the Chinese version was republished in the Taiwan Medical Journal (its circulation was 14,000 copies at the time). Starting from November 15, 1986, the Chinese version of the Bulletin was ordered to be included into the former DOH official magazine Health Monthly and was no longer officially and independently published, but a special separate issue of this exact portion continued to be sent to the former recipients of the Bulletin the same old way but under a different name. However, the English version did continue to keep its identity without any changes. In September 1987, the magazine added a special column on international disease prevention to accommodate some reports or excerpts of articles about outbreaks occurred happened abroad. And in September 1990, the Chinese version of the Bulletin resumed its independence and has not altered its publication format since then. When the CDC was founded in 1999, the Chinese version of the Epidemiology Bulletin once again expanded its mailing list to include school nurses of all domestic elementary and junior high schools and libraries of all colleges and universities in Taiwan, so the circulating volume jumped to 20,000 copies. However we have made it a rule that

whenever a foreigner pays a formal visit to the Taiwan CDC, we would include that visitor's name on the mailing list of the English edition. Every year we conducted a readers' opinion survey to find out the readers' preferences and to make the content more suitable to the readers' tastes and needs. In those days we also initiated some discussions about further improvement in publication format size or color, but nothing has done about those approaches for many reasons.

As we mentioned before, the magazine has published two versions, one in Chinese and the other in English, for each and every issue ever since its inception without exception. According to an article marking the first anniversary, the very first issue had only 2,000 copies of the Chinese version and about 200 copies of the English one. One year later, the copy number of the Chinese version increased to 10,000, and that of the English version still remained low at about 600. The Chinese copies were mailed to individuals working at local health and medical institutions, while the English copies were distributed to readers residing in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Japan, Singapore, and Thailand. They have in time become one of the best media to facilitate international exchange. Following the current trend of realizing electronic government, we are gradually replacing the traditional paper edition with an e-mail version. Moreover, the entire issue is going to be posted on the Taiwan CDC website for any interested people to download and read.

The twenty-first century is an era of pursuing high efficiency and service quality. We at Epidemiology Bulletin are determined to adopt outstanding editorial ideals and do our best to provide excellent service to our readers at large. Here we would like to remind all our readers to drop us a line or call whenever you find any flaws or imperfections in the magazine, so we can make further

improvements in the future.