

The history of the *International Journal of Technology Assessment in Health Care*

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BACKGROUND

The 1970s and early 1980s was the period in which high technology medicine became dominant. It had begun in the late 1950s with the introduction of effective artificial respiratory technology. This gave physicians, patients, and families the hope that the threats to fundamental life processes such as breathing could be countered by technology, and the dilemma of both meeting its costs and the ethical challenges of how to remove it when its use no longer produced benefits.

Other technologies soon joined the respirator as high-cost agents of care such as the artificial kidney (1960s), the computerized tomography scanner (CT) in 1972, and nuclear magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) in 1977. In addition to such significant inventions, technological health care was supported by an array of other technologies with more modest costs which, nonetheless, exerted large effects on the nature and cost of practice. These included the numerous laboratory tests, which automated analyzers permitted to be ordered in groups of twenty to forty at a time, as well as a large increase in pharmaceutical products claimed to be effective in treating the functional and pathological aspects of illness.

During the 1970s and into the early 1980s, national institutions in the United States were forming to study and issue reports on how society should apply and pay for these innovations, most notably the Office of Technology Assessment (OTA) at the U.S. Congress, and the National Center for Health Care Technology, established in the federal government and directed by Seymour Perry.

At this time, informal discussions took place among different groups of people about the need of a forum for exchange of ideas in the field. In 1979, Egon Jonsson organized the first international conference on HTA in Stockholm, Sweden (2). Tore Schersten, a Swede who was later the President

of the International Society for Technology Assessment in Health Care (ISTAHC), was chairman of the conference. Participants in the conference included Johannes Vang, David Banta, and Per Buch Andreassen. Schersten, Banta, and Buch Andreassen were all subsequently elected President of ISTAHC. More than thirty participants from several countries, including Sweden, the United States, Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, Finland, and Switzerland took part in the conference. At this conference, the first discussions began about the necessity to have active and structured international contacts for the field of HTA.

Subsequently, David Banta, working at OTA, developed a series of papers on how healthcare technology was being dealt with in nine countries. The publication of these papers led to a Rockefeller Foundation-funded “Bellagio Conference” in 1980 that made it possible for further international contacts to be made (1). In addition to Banta, Jonsson, Clyde Behney, and others already working in HTA, representatives of the World Health Organization and the World Bank took part.

THE SORCERER’S APPRENTICE

One of the recommendations of the Bellagio conference was that OTA start a newsletter on HTA, which was launched in January 1981, under the editorship of Clyde Behney. The name, *The Sorcerer’s Apprentice* was chosen “. . .to imply the immense, seemingly magical power that technology can possess.”

The newsletter was private, with a subscription cost of \$12 a year, and it was published 3 times a year. By 1983, the newsletter had grown to thirty pages and had ten network correspondents from nine countries. It contained both overviews

of technology assessments, and personal commentary in the form of writing and cartoons about the use and effects of technologies. The Sorcerer's Apprentice can rightly claim honors as the first regular publication in the technology assessment field.

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF TECHNOLOGY ASSESSMENT IN HEALTH CARE

The success of *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, along with growing international interest in HTA, led directly to a discussion about the need for a scientific journal to assess healthcare technology at the same time as there was an agreement of the need for an international society in the field. The main individuals participating in devising ways to bring together the international technology assessment community at this time included David Banta, Clyde Behney, Tore Schersten, Johannes Vang, Ruth Hanft, Seymour Perry, Miriam Orleans, Barbara Stocking, Norman Weissman, Bernard Bloom, Egon Jonsson, and Stanley Reiser.

When Stanley Reiser and Egon Jonsson first met, at Harvard University in 1982, they discussed the prospects of launching an international scientific journal on technology assessment in health care. Because Reiser recently had published the book *Medicine and the Reign of Technology*, with Cambridge University Press in New York (4), he approached the Press about their interest in publishing such a journal.

An agreement was quickly made with Cambridge University Press and its supportive American Director, Barbara Colson (who by coincidence had been considering the need for such a publication), to produce a journal, and Jonsson and Reiser began their work in organizing the Journal's function the same year. The first task was creating an Editorial Board. Its major challenge was melding the need to gain representation from countries with established or nascent assessment activities, with the requirement of having as members the best available individuals in the field who also were willing to give time to the Journal. Our expectations were met on both counts as the composition of the *Journal's* first Board shows (Table 1). The current Editorial Board of the *Journal* includes representatives of twenty-two countries, and of WHO (Table 2).

Task two was deciding basic purpose and content. We recognized that the Journal must serve the critical functions of not only encouraging the best possible analysis of the issues facing health technology assessment, but of also bringing together its far-flung constituents and forging a community of them. These purposes critically shaped its content. For we needed articles that had not only scholarly excellence but also portrayed the viewpoints and values that shaped technology assessment in all parts of its international constituency. Achieving a balance between these two requirements at times made for difficult judgments.

Over the years, the Journal has grown substantially from a couple of hundred subscribers, to the circulation of today of approximately 4,000 including online subscriptions. "An impressive amount of scholarly articles in the field of health technology assessment has been published in these years; approximately 2,000 manuscripts, authored by approximately 6,000 people, covering more than 20,000 printed pages in close to 100 issues. The Journal has contributed greatly to the development of the field of HTA." (3).

A unique feature of the Journal that proved to be significant was in-depth, multiple-essay analyses of key issues and developments in the field, put together by guest editors and overseen by the editors-in-chief. They were soon titled "Special Sections," and appeared in the Journal from its first Volume in 1985 until 2002. At times, their scope was so large that it was necessary to publish an additional issue of the Journal to hold their content. In all, forty-eight Special Sections were produced, whose subjects ranged from assessing how technology could effectively aid the elderly not only to be healthy but to live independently, to how different countries organized assessment activities and influenced their nation's policies (Table 3).

In the 25-year history of the Journal, begun in 1985, it has had a close relationship with the International Society of Technology Assessment in Health Care (ISTAHC) and later with Health Technology Assessment International (HTAi). The ISTAHC was formed a year after the Journal's creation, and made the Journal its official publication. Indeed after several years of independent existence, all Society memberships included the price of a Journal subscription. Clearly, the Journal represented the Society not only to its members, many of whom published articles within it, but also to the world at large.

During this long association, there have been at times questions raised by the Society about the Journal's independence. Some argued for the society's control of the publication, because it was designated as its official public scholarly organ. Legally, of course, the issue is nondebatable. Cambridge University Press owns the Journal. Practically the Society's history, particularly as it ran into financial difficulties in 2002, showed the advantage of a separate ownership. Intellectually, the greatest danger facing any journal is becoming what historians call a "court" publication. This is the peril of the representatives of the organization owning and funding a journal unduly influencing its content and editorial board judgments. That the Society continues to favor such ownership and editorial separation augers well for the Journal's future.

Our service to the Society and the growing community that reads the pages of the Journal, and our work and friendships over the years with Editorial Board members and authors have been highlights of our professional careers and personal lives. That the Journal shall continue to flourish is a hope we hold deeply.

Table 1. Editorial Board of the *International Journal of Technology Assessment in Health Care* 1985**Editors**

Egon Jonsson, PhD
Professor, The Karolinska Institute and Spri, Stockholm, Sweden

Stanley J. Reiser, MD, PhD
Professor, Program on Humanities and Technology in Health Care, The University of Texas, Health Science Center at Houston, Houston, Texas, USA

Associate Editors

Geza Adam
Ministry of Health of the Hungarian People's Republic, Budapest, Hungary

Michael Anbar, PhD
Professor, Department of Biophysical Sciences, State University of New York at Buffalo, Buffalo, New York, USA

H. David Banta, MD, PhD
Consultant, World Health Organization, The Hague, Netherlands

Clyde Behney
Health Program Manager, Office of the Technology Assessment, Congress of the United States, Washington, DC, USA

Jan E. Blanpain, MD
Professor, Department of Hospital Administration and Medical Care Organization, Leuven, Belgium

Paul F. Gross
Director, Institute of Health Economics and Technology Assessment, North Sydney, Australia

Ruth S. Hanft
Health Policy Consultant, Washington, DC, USA

John Hutton
Senior Research Fellow, University of York, York, England

Pia M. Jonsson, MD
The Karolinska Institute, The Karolinska Hospital, Stockholm, Sweden

Samuel Korper, PhD
Associate Director for Legislation, National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, Maryland, USA

Seymour Perry, MD
Deputy Director, Institute for Health Policy Analysis, Georgetown University Medical Center, Washington, DC, USA

Tore Schersten, MD, PhD
Dean, Faculty of Medicine, University of Goteborg, Department of Surgery, Goteburg, Sweden

Barbara Stocking
Fellow, King's Fund College, London, England

Johannes Vang, MD, PhD
Regional Officer of Health Technology Assessment, World Health Organization, Copenhagen, Denmark

Norman Weissman, PhD
Director, Division of Extramural Research, National Center for Health Services, Research and Health Care Technology Assessment, Rockville, Maryland, USA

Editorial Board

Faye G. Abdeliah, RN, EdD, ScD
Deputy Surgeon General, Chief Nurse Officer, US Public Health Service, Rockville, Maryland, USA

Tetsuzo Akutsu
Deputy President, National Cardiovascular Center, Osaka, Japan

Per Buch Andreasen, MD, PhD
Department of Gastroenterology and Clinical Pharmacology, Gentofte University Hospital, Hellerup, Denmark

John R. Ball, MD, JD
Associate Vice President, American College of Physicians, Washington, DC, USA

Jeremiah A. Barondess, MD
Professor, Cornell University Medical College, New York, New York, USA

Aldo Bujevic
Professor, Zagreb Institute of Public Health, Zagreb, Yugoslavia

John P. Bunker, MD
Professor, School of Medicine, Stanford University, Stanford, California, USA

Table 1. Continued

Carlos Canitrot Sub-Secretario de Regulacion y Control, Ministerio de Salud Publica, Y Medio Ambiente de Argentina, Buenos Aires, Argentina
Dr. Hesio Cordeira Professor, Universidad Federal de Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
Henry Danielsson, MD Professor, Secretary General, The Swedish Medical Research Council, Stockholm, Sweden
Luigi Donato, MD Professor, Instituto di Fisiologia Clinica CNR, Pisa, Italy
Robert Evans, PhD Professor, Department of Economics, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia,
Uwe Faust Professor, University of Stuttgart, Institute for Biomedical Technology, Federal Republic of Germany
Jose Laguna Garcia Secretaria de Salubridad y Asistencia de Mexico, Mexico City, Mexico
L.M.J. Groot Professor, Faculty of Medicine, Riksuniversiteit Limburg, Maastricht, Netherlands
David Gunnarsson Managing Director, Rikisspitalar, Reykjavik, Iceland
Peter F. Hjort, MD Professor, National Institute of Public Health, Oslo, Norway
Bruno Horisberger Director, Center for Public Health, St. Gallen, Switzerland
Bryan Jennett, MD Dean, Faculty of Medicine, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, Scotland
Kirsten Staehr Johansen, MD, DDS Regional Officer for Appropriate Technology for Health, World Health Organization, Copenhagen, Denmark
Jean Francoise la Cronique, MD Professor, Rue de Leningrad 17, Paris, France
Professor Lechaim Naggan, MD, DrPH Dr. Herman Kessel Professor of Epidemiology, BGU Center for Health Services, Beer Sheva, Israel
Duncan Neuhauser, PhD Professor, Department of Community Health, School of Medicine, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio, USA
Miriam Orleans, PhD Professor, Department of Preventive Medicine and Biometrics, University of Colorado, Health Sciences Center, Denver, Colorado, USA
Dr. Masamitso Osima President, The Medical Information System, Development Center, Tokyo, Japan
Frederick C. Robbins, MD President, Institute of Medicine, National Academy of Sciences, Washington, DC, USA
Steven Schroeder, MD Professor, Division of General Internal Medicine, University of California, School of Medicine, San Francisco, California, USA
Henry Troupp, MD, PhD Department of Neurosurgery, Topeliusgatan 5, Helinski, Finland
A.H. Wilfried Wahba, PhD World Health Organization, Copenhagen, Denmark
Francisco J. Yepes, MD, PhD Secretario General, Ministerio de Salud, Bogota, Columbia

Table 2. Country Representation on the Editorial Board of the *International Journal of Technology Assessment in Health Care* as of 2009

Argentina
 Australia
 Austria
 Belgium
 Canada
 China
 Finland
 France
 Germany
 Italy
 Japan
 Mexico
 The Netherlands
 New Zealand
 Norway
 Scotland
 Singapore
 Spain
 Sweden
 United Kingdom
 United States
 Vietnam
 WHO

Table 3. ISTAHC Journal Special Sections (1985 to 2002)**1985****Special Section: Technology and Health Care For the Elderly**

Volume 1, Number 1, 1985

Guest Editors: Alvar Svanborg, Barbara Stocking

Special Section: Advanced Technology and Health Care in the Home

Volume 1, Number 2, 1985

Guest Editor: Jan E. Blanpain

Special Section: An International View of Magnetic Resonance – Imaging and Spectroscopy

Volume 1, Number 3, 1985

Guest Editors: Tore Scherstén, Jane E. Sisk

Special Section: The Technology of Prenatal Care

Volume 1, Number 4, 1985

Guest Editors: H. David Banta, Susanne Houd, Elbio Suarez Ojeda

1986**Special Section: Technology Assessment: Policy, Clinical, and Methodological Issues**

Volume 2, Number 1, 1986

Guest Editors: Henry Danielsson, Itzhak Jacoby, Johannes Vang

Special Section: The Cultural Shaping of Biomedical Science and Technology

Volume 2, Number 2, 1986

Guest Editor: Renée J. Fox

Special Section: Transplantation and Artificial Organs

Volume 2, Number 3, 1986

Guest Editors: John P. Bunker, Bryan Jennett

Special Section: The Evaluation of Drugs: An International Perspective

Volume 2, Number 4, 1986

Guest Editors: Louis Lasagna, Lars Werko

1987**Special Section: Educating Practitioners in the Appropriate Use of Technology**

Guest Editors: Jeremiah A. Barondess, John Lister

Volume 3, Number 1, 1987

Table 3. Continued

Special Section: The Organization and Use of Technology in the Hospital

Part I: Social, Economic, and Political Issues

Guest Editors: Jerome H. Grossman, Bruno Horisberger

Volume 3, Number 2, 1987

Special Section: The Organization and Use of Technology in the Hospital

Part II: Case Studies

Guest Editors: Jerome H. Grossman, Bruno Horisberger

Volume 3, Number 3, 1987

1988

Special Section: Technology Assessment and the Alteration of Medical Practices

Guest Editors: Henry Danielsson, Itzhak Jacoby, Johannes Vang

Volume 4, Number 1, 1988

Special Section: Health Care Systems and the Diffusion of Technology, Part I

Guest Editor: Odin W. Anderson

Volume 4, Number 2, 1988

Special Section: Health Care Systems and the Diffusion of Technology, Part II

Guest Editor: Odin W. Anderson

Volume 4, Number 3, 1988

1989

Special Section: Technology in Primary Care and Ambulatory Settings

Guest Editors: John D. Stoeckle, Hannu Vuori, Donald A. Young

Volume 5, Number 1, 1989

Special Section: Technology Assessment and Surgical Policy

Guest Editors: John P. Bunker, Michael Baum

Volume 5, Number 3, 1989

Special Section: Alternative Methods for Assessing Technology, Part I

Guest Editor: David M. Eddy

Volume 5, Number 4, 1989

1990

Special Section: Alternative Methods for Assessing Technology, Part II

Guest Editor: David M. Eddy

Volume 6, Number 1, 1990

Special Section: Measuring Health Care Effectiveness: Use of Large Data Bases for Technology and Quality Assessments

Guest Editors: Ruth S. Hanft, Jane E. Sisk, Catherine C. White

Volume 6, Number 2, 1990

Special Section: Assessing the Technology of Dentistry, Part I

Guest Editors: Lars E. A. Folke, Paul Goldhaber

Volume 6, Number 3, 1990

Special Section: Assessing the Technology of Dentistry, Part II

Guest Editors: Lars E. A. Folke, Paul Goldhaber

Volume 6, Number 4, 1990

1991

Special Section: The Contribution of Medical Registries to Technology Assessment

Guest Editors: Elisabeth Burdick, Marie-A. McPherson, Frederick Mosteller

Volume 7, Number 2, Spring 1991

Special Section: Assessment of Preventive Technologies

Guest Editors: Jeffrey P. Koplan, Felix F. Gutzwiller

Volume 7, Number 3, 1991

Special Section: Obstetric Technology: A Future Perspective

Guest Editors: Miriam Orleans, Elina Hemminki

Volume 7, Number 4, 1991

1992

Special Section: Assessing the Technology of Physical Therapy

Guest Editors: Nancy T. Watts, Margareta af Klinteberg

Volume 8, Number 1, 1992

Table 3. Continued**Special Section: Intensive Care: Where are We?**

Guest Editors: Bernard S. Bloom, Dag Lundberg
Volume 8, Number 3, 1992

Special Section: Orphan Technologies

Guest Editor: Judith Wagner
Volume 8, Number 4, 1992

1993**Special Section: Industry and the Generation of Technology**

Guest Editor: Jerome Grossman
Volume 9, Number 2, 1993

Special Section: Industry and the Generation of Technology, Part II

Guest Editor: Jerome Grossman
Volume 9, Number 3, 1993

1994**Special Section: Vaccines and Public Health: Assessing Technologies and Public Policies**

Guest Editors: Phyllis Freeman, Regina Rabinovich, Anthony Robbins
Volume 10, Number 1, 1994

Special Section: Assessing Nursing and Technology

Guest Editors: Mary Mundinger, Duncan Neuhauser
Volume 10, Number 2, 1994

Special Section: Technology Assessment in Japan

Guest Editors: Naoki Ikegami, Akinori Hisashige
Volume 10, Number 3, 1994

Special Section: Genetic Technology

Guest Editors: Frederick C. Robbins, Arno G. Motulsky, Thomas H. Murray
Volume 10, Number 4, 1994

1995**Special Section: Technology and Disability**

Guest Editors: John Hutton, Jan Persson
Volume 11, Number 2, 1995

Special Section: The Rational Use of Therapeutic Drugs

Guest Editors: John P. Bunker, Peter F. Carpenter, Philip R. Lee
Volume 11, Number 3, 1995

Special Section: Needs-Based Technology Assessment: Who Can Afford Not to Use It?

Guest Editors: Yves Bergevin, Peter Tugwell
Volume 11, Number 4, 1995

1996**Special Section: The Quality of the Medical Evidence: Is It Good Enough?**

Section Editors: Kay Dickersin, Andrew Herxheimer
Volume 12, Number 2, 1996

Special Section: The Assessment of Psychiatry

Guest Editor: Claes-Goran Westrin
Volume 12, Number 4, 1996

1997**Special Section: Report From the Eur-Assess Project Eur-Assess**

Coordinator: H. David Banta
Volume 13, Number 2, 1997

Special Section: The Use and Abuse of Low Cost Technologies

Section Editor: Jeremiah A. Barondess
Volume 13, Number 4, 1997

1998**Special Section: The Consumer and Technology**

Section Editor: Jane E. Sisk
Volume 14, Number 1, 1998

Special Section: Early Identification and Assessment of Emerging Health Technology

Section Editors: Per Carlsson and Torben Jorgensen
Volume 14, Number 4, 1998

Table 3. Continued

1999

Special Section: Assessing Reproductive Technology

Section Editors: Miriam Orleans, Elina Hemminki

Volume 15, Number 1, 1999

2000

Special Section: Health Technology Assessment in the European Union

Section Editors: David Banta, Wija Oortwijn

Volume 16, Number 2, 2000

Special Section: Clinical Practice Guidelines in the 21st Century

Section Editor: J. Jaime Caro

Volume 16, Number 4, 2000

2001

Special Section: Bayesian Approaches to Technology Assessment and Decision Making

Section Editors: Bryan R. Luce, Ya-Chen Tina Shih, Karl Claxton

Volume 17, Number 1, 2001

Special Section: Health Policy, Health Technology Assessment, and Screening in Europe

Section Editors: H. David Banta, Wija Oortwijn, Richard Cranovsky

Volume 17, Number 3, 2001

2002

Special Section: National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) – Symposium on Technology Assessment

Section Editors: Rod Taylor, David Barnett

Volume 18, Number 2, 2002

Special Section: Reports of the ECHTA/ECAHI Project

Section Editors: Egon Jonsson, H. David Banta, Chris Henshall, Laura Sampietro-Colom

Volume 18, Number 2, 2002

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1. Banta HD, ed. *Resources for health: Technology assessment for policy making*. New York: Praeger; 1982.
2. International Workshop on Evaluation of Medical Technology. *Swedish Planning and Rationalisation Institute of the Health Services*. Stockholm: Spri; 1979; 3089:1.
3. Jonsson E, Reiser SJ. Editorial. *Int J Technol Assess Health Care*. 2008;24:243-224.
4. Reiser SJ. *Medicine and the reign of technology*. New York: Cambridge University Press; 1978.