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Voices from the Editorial Board

The New Culture of Medical History

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In this editorial, I'd like to reflect briefly on the launch of the journal of the European Association for the History of Medicine and Health. In particular, I'd like to consider the journal's emergence from the perspective of a medical historian employed and residing in the UK since 2000. I have also long engaged with research groups fostered by the European Association for the History of Medicine and Health (EAHMH), and have been a member of the Executive Committee of the Society for the Social History of Medicine (SSHM), before joining the Scientific Board of the EAHMH in 2013. Besides having attended and been involved in the organisation of its conferences, I served as the EAHMH's President (2017–2019). Although not involved in the production of the new journal, together with Laurinda Abreu, I assist Frank Huisman as an Editor of the EAHMH and Brill's *Clio Medica* book series.

My first contact with the EAHMH was in early 2005, while serving as the Conference Coordinator of the Society for the Social History of Medicine. As is now customary, a representative of the SSHM was invited to join the Scientific Board of the EAHMH to help select papers for their biennial conference. The 2005 conference on the theme of 'Cultural History' was being hosted in Paris by the then President, Patrice Bourdelais. Besides reading and assessing dozens of

abstracts, what was memorable about this occasion was encountering a group of senior scholars in European medical history whose work and names were, for various reasons, unfamiliar. This was my first encounter with what appeared to be two cultures of medical history in Europe, one Continental and the other British. Upon discussing my experience with colleagues back in Birmingham, I was equally struck by the fact that my colleagues working in other historical fields were more familiar with the scholarship of some of these European scholars than were those working in the medical history field in Britain. As a medical historian working in Britain, perhaps my focus had already become far too honed on the well-funded activities of medical historians in the United Kingdom.

I next engaged with the activities of the EAHMH approximately two years later when I was invited to join the Scientific Board of the International Network for the History of Hospitals (INHH), one of many research networks to grow out of the EAHMH, and with whom I enjoyed several years of close academic affiliation. Initially assisting with the organisation of the INHH's 'Patient Experience' conference held in London (2007), I attended subsequent events on 'Hospitals and Communities' in Barcelona (2009), 'Daily Life and the Hospital' in Lisbon/Evora (2011), hosted a conference on 'Hospital Food' in Brussels (2013), before attending two further events on 'Segregation and Integration' in Dubrovnik (2015) and 'Beauty and the Hospital' in Malta (2017). Papers from these productive sessions have since been published in several edited collections and special issues of specialist journals. More importantly, following these events, I found myself within an enriched international network of hospital historians who have led me to rethink the history of that institution in ways I had never imagined. Previously, my attention was focused perhaps too exclusively on British and North-American hospitals and the work of academics now based there. The new and valuable perspectives gained from my affiliation with the INHH alone made the challenges of editing papers by non-native English speakers at a later date a very worthwhile experience. I also came to admire greatly my British colleagues who made more use of their other language skills, which I had rarely employed since my days as an undergraduate history student.

Shortly after the very fruitful INHH event on 'Hospital Food' in Belgium (2013), I was invited to join the Scientific Board of the EAHMH and was elected their Secretary in Lisbon at the 'Risk and Disaster' conference. From this vantage point, I was naturally inclined to compare the EAHMH with the SSHM, on whose Executive Committee I sat until 2008 after six years of service. One of the first and most obvious differences between the two societies was the absence of a book series and journal at the EAHMH; this seemed a very clear

'risk' to the Association, and few on its Scientific Board even wished to contemplate the 'disaster' that awaited should these gaps remain unaddressed. Occasional volumes had been published and financed by the EAHMH. In the 1990s there were publications on the subjects of *Coping with Sickness* (1995) and *Culture, Knowledge and Healing* (1998), based on a past conference (in Lunteren, Netherlands) and the very first research network sponsored by the EAHMH (on the history of homeopathy) respectively, but this kind of published output eventually ceased after the appearance of six volumes. The newsletter of the SSHM, the *Bulletin*, on the other hand, had since grown into the premier journal it is today and generated funds which supported student essay prizes, student conference bursaries, among other initiatives aimed primarily at early career scholars. In the meantime, the EAHMH newsletter (initially organised and edited by Professors Claude Debru and Christian Bonah), like the occasional volumes, had ceased publication. Subsequent monographs had been organised by Association members, but conference papers, such as those presented at INHH meetings, for example, were published by Peter Lang, while some papers from our Brussels event made up a dossier in a specialist journal, and looked to be dispersed still further in future rather than feeding into either an Association journal or book series. Around this time, Brian Dolan, the editor of *Clio Medica* (and who edited the series out of his unit at the University of California, San Francisco) asked if I was interested in taking over editorship of the well-established book series published by the Amsterdam-based publisher, Rodopi. I instead brought the series to the EAHMH, which I regarded as a far more suitable home.

Prior to taking up the role of President of the EAHMH, negotiations with Brill, the new publishers of *Clio Medica*, were concluded, and our team of editors looked forward both to continuing this valuable series and encouraging our members to contribute monographs, which now exceeded 100 in number. Meanwhile, the EAHMH had extended its reach into central Europe under the Presidency of Octavian Buda, who is based in Bucharest. Besides local trips and the presentation of papers which reflected regional aspects of the location of the 'Body Politic' conference, we looked forward to proposals for the *Clio Medica* series that reflected the growing diversity of our membership, which mirrored that of the European Union itself. Two years later, I was in the office of President when the first volumes under the new lead editorship of Frank Huisman were published and announced to attendees of our 'Sense and Nonsense' conference in Birmingham. At that time, we were all discussing the 'nonsense' that is Brexit and its implications for our own research and the Association. Shortly afterwards, discussions of a journal for the Association commenced and appeared to make 'sense' to more of the members of our

Scientific Board. The SSHM and EAHMH no longer looked so different, at least in the ways I initially identified.

With the book series, I regard the journal as a way for the EAHMH to complete an important professional function. The book series, but the journal especially, provides the EAHMH with a home for many of the research initiatives it inspires, whether from its research networks or its conferences. Although open to studies of many other regions, the organisation of the editorial board will also better represent more than just the English-speaking community of medical historians. Besides publishing articles in their home language online, it will provide authors with additional support and skills (publishing mentors, if you will) required to bring their work to audiences outside their national borders, and in a periodical that better represents Europe's diverse medical cultures historically. Besides simply providing members and conference attendees with attractive settings for its biennial events, the EAHMH can now extend the reach of its networks and make the most of the research it has generated. It can also better update its dispersed membership, not only through its 'country files' which will usefully summarise new medical history research and activities in various featured countries, but as work from its various initiatives (whether presented at biennial conferences or research networks) is developed into the journal's primary content. Hopefully, the journal will also enjoy financial success, which will further stimulate new initiatives by augmenting seed money to support research networks and permitting more generous student bursaries in the future. At a time when many in the UK will find it more difficult to physically traverse European borders, initiatives like this should help medical historians maintain their networks and perhaps even strengthen them.