

Editorial

Mark My Words

I have previously espoused this view, but it seems to your editor that medical specialties can be viewed using the lexicon of Physics. At one end of the spectrum we find Relativity (The world of the very large - like my own specialty, Radiology) and at the other end, the world of the very small: Quantum Mechanics. In this edition, we consider as our review article, another of the 'quantum' subjects: Immunology. David Edgar is to be congratulated on producing such a well-written and lucid article, on what can be a vastly complicated and perplexing subject. His review on immunology gives the reader a synopsis of current thinking on this central subject.

Principal aspirations of a general journal, like ours, should be education and diversity. In this edition we consider subjects as varied as Sclerosing Cholangitis Overlap Syndrome; visual assessment in children with neurological disorders; the impact of the Emergency Nurse Practitioner; the history of Tuberculosis and its tangential orbit with one of Ireland's greatest literary dynasties. Also, editor emeritus, Patrick Morrison, works the neat trick of seamlessly melding ancient and modern mythology with the unveiling of genetics' latest contribution to our increased understanding of gigantism.

Another innovation within this edition is 'Grand Rounds'. The concept of Grand Rounds is anything but new, of course. What I envisage for it is a portal or forum aimed directly at non-specialists, doctors in training, and medical students. This edition's inaugural paper is, 'The optimal management of Peripheral Vascular Disease for the non-specialist' by Mark O'Donnell et al. I would hope that this feature speaks directly and cogently both to those approaching examinations, as well as those in established clinical practice.

I am pleased to say that, thanks to the hard work of our tireless sub-editor, Mary Crickard, the experiment with social networking continues and I hope you will follow us on Facebook and Twitter (UMJ_Belfast). It is perhaps worth restating that all of our previous editions are available, free, on line via the Ulster Medical Society, (www.ums.ac.uk/journal). I would be delighted, as always, to receive your thoughts and ideas for these and future directions (editor@umj.ac.uk).

It gives one perspective and is a somewhat sobering thought to appreciate that it is the privilege of the Journal editors to have an obituary within these pages. I knew him as Dr Gibson for many years, and as Mark, latterly. One day, we were having a conversation about albatrosses, as one did with Mark, and I was blathering on about the Rime of the Ancient Mariner. I had, and loved, an audio version from the *Nation's Favourite Poems*, read by John Nettles. Lovely, murmured Mark. By any chance, had I heard the Richard Burton version? I hadn't? Ah. The following day, there it was, sitting unobtrusively on my desk. The Welsh wizard was as magnificent as had been advertised. Mark was a very courageous man who bore his illness and met his fate with grace and courage. Among his

many attributes, he had a profound but quietly-kept faith. Hiding, as it were, his light under many bushels. I hope, in repose, that he might approve of this slice of Coleridge¹:

Oh sleep it is a gentle thing
Beloved from pole to pole
To Mary Queen the praise be given
She sent the gentle sleep from Heaven
That slid into my soul.

It is an extraordinary coincidence that I would eventually like Mark, become editor of the Ulster Medical Journal. The link editorially, between us, is Patrick Morrison. I owe a great debt of thanks to Patrick and also to his co-author, Stanley Hawkins, for rising manfully to the task of preparing Mark's obituary. In doing so, with determination and great discipline, they have distilled a life into one short page. To sum up a life's aggregate with its achievements, disappointments, aspirations, joys and heartaches is no easy business. However, not your obituary this, Mark: my words.

As the new decade begins, it's not unusual to evaluate, assess and take stock. Searching for perspective can be challenging, living, as we do, on what Douglas Adams described as the *unfashionable* western spiral arm of the galaxy². Almost twenty years ago (February 14th, 1990) the astrophysicist and cosmologist Carl Sagan persuaded NASA engineers to turn Voyager 1 around, some four billion miles from earth, for, as it were, a last peek over its shoulder, as it exited our planetary solar system³. His purpose was to give us a unique perspective of our place in space. As he wrote himself, the earth appeared merely as "a mote of dust, suspended in a sunbeam." I would urge you to make the time, to take the time, to enjoy Sagan's audiovisual masterpiece, 'Pale Blue Dot'. It's four minutes long.

(www.youtube.com/watch?v=jhGKwo6-Lce).

That accomplished, and feeling cosmologically small enough, we can return to work. On behalf of the editorial team, in our mote of the unfashionable western spiral arm, may I wish you and yours a blameless 2011.

Live long and prosper, and don't panic².

Barry Kelly
Honorary Editor

REFERENCES

1. Coleridge S. The Rime of the Ancient Mariner. *The Best Poems of the English Language*. New York. Harper Collins. 2004. p358-376.
2. Adams D. *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. Oxford. Pan Books. 1992
3. Davidson K. *Carl Sagan: A Life*. New York. John Wiley & Sons; 1999. p398