



## IN MEMORIAM

# In memoriam Wendy Thompson, 1944–2008

P. Howard

It is my sad duty to report that Wendy Thompson, the first Publications Manager of the *European Respiratory Journal* (*ERJ*), died unexpectedly on December 8, 2008, of a myocardial infarction.

Wendy Thompson was born in Sheffield (UK) in 1944, and lived in the city all her life. Although she left school with little in the way of qualifications, Wendy had a determined attitude to work and enjoyed progressing her own skills. Indeed, this is all the more reason to admire what she achieved in the world of medical publishing.

I first met Wendy in the early 1970s, just after I had acquired the rights to a vinyl repair process. My business applied the technique to the repair of vandalised bus seats, and Wendy managed the company for me. A few years later, my own and Wendy's connection with the *ERJ* began.

After the Sheffield Conference of the European Society for Clinical Respiratory Physiology (*Societas Europaea Physiologiae Clinicae Respiratoriae* (SEPCR)) in 1980, Prof. Paul Sadoul, facing retirement, offered the Journal he had founded, the *Bulletin Européen de Physiopathologie Respiratoire* (also called *The Bulletin*), to SEPCR. I was deputed to manage *The Bulletin* for SEPCR.

*The Bulletin* was a journal of high scientific calibre, written in French with abstracts in English, of which the late Prof. Jean-Claude Yernault was the Scientific Editor. The publication had a limited circulation and was quite unable to afford the financial demands of its publisher, Pergamon Press. After an acrimonious meeting at the publisher's offices, we cancelled the contract.

What then? Another commercial publisher? Computer typesetting was just appearing, pushing hot metal into oblivion, so the general feeling was, why not do it ourselves? A private company was registered in the UK, but it was always agreed that the operation would be on behalf of the Society and any profits would accrue to it. So, bus seats were ditched and we published scientific journals instead. Wendy was heavily involved from the start and taught herself, and later others, how to do the desktop publishing. As SEPCR had no money, I put in the development capital. We assembled the first issues on the kitchen table at The White House, my home in Sheffield, using the existing technical editors and printer in Nancy, France.

SEPCR now had a journal but the finances were marginal as the circulation was not big enough. Munksgaard (Copenhagen, Denmark) had the *European Journal of Respiratory Diseases* (*EJRD*), of which Prof. Erik Berglund and the late Prof. Paul Vermeire were the Editors. In 1985, formal discussions commenced with the purpose of merging *The Bulletin* and the *EJRD*. These negotiations led to a merger of the two to form the *ERJ*, an English-language publication, the first issue of which was published in January 1988. It was agreed that the *ERJ* would be a 50/50 venture, with marketing and distribution dealt with by Munksgaard, and publication remaining in Sheffield. Munksgaard, confident that our computer operation would fail, agreed to publication in Sheffield, hoping to subsequently gain the whole Journal. It is thanks to Wendy's efforts that they were to be confounded. Indeed, the Journal's growing success, particularly in the American market, was a catalyst to the merger of SEPCR and the European Society of Pneumology (*Societas Europaea Pneumologica* (SEP)) to form the European Respiratory Society in 1990. The *ERJ* was adopted as the official journal of the new Society.

With its success, the *ERJ* operation became too big for The White House and moved into a disused cutlery factory: Hutton's Buildings in Sheffield. Wendy's skills made her the obvious choice to take on the role of Publications Manager. She managed a team of desktop publishers and technical editors and, when print of the *ERJ* moved to the UK, she established strong links with the new printers. Prof. Philip Quanjer chaired



Wendy Thompson with the *European Respiratory Journal* (*ERJ*) past-Chief Editors in Brussels (Belgium), 1998, celebrating the first 10 years of the *ERJ*. From left to right: Prof. Ulrich Costabel, Prof. Erik Berglund, Prof. Jean-Claude Yernault, and Prof. Paul Vermeire.

STATEMENT OF INTEREST: None declared.

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the Management Board of the *ERJ*, with whom Wendy regularly liaised, just as she did with past *ERJ* Chief Editors.

Wendy proved well up to the management tasks. She had a capacity for grasping the ever-increasing complexity of computer typesetting technology, and our printers only had to copy and bind the pages. As time went on, we invested in up-to-date machines equal to the task of a worldwide journal. At business meetings, Wendy always had everything ready and the necessary documents to hand: contracts to be signed, facts and figures regarding reprints, and the details of all areas that required discussion. There were hairy moments of course, particularly when Sheffield industry poached our well-trained typesetters. But such difficulties were quickly resolved, and Wendy promptly interviewed and trained new staff members, displaying a "get on with the job" zeal typical to her determination in work and life.

Later, Munksgaard, always very helpful and pleasant partners, were bought out. The Society became the owners in title and of the means of production of one of the world's finest academic

journals, a position few Societies have achieved. As time went on, new publications were added: the *ERJ Supplement*, the *European Respiratory Review*, the *Topic* and the *Buyers' Guide*, each with its own profit centre. Meanwhile, Wendy became a familiar face at the Society's annual conferences, and formed close and lasting friendships with many of the Editors, Editorial Board members and work partners. She also represented the *ERJ* at other medical conferences around the world.

By 1995, with the *ERJ* well established, the assets and management were transferred to the Society's Administration in Lausanne. After the transfer, Wendy and I went our separate ways, with Wendy continuing for a few years, completing the transfer and then retiring.

Wendy passes with our appreciation for the part she played in the birth of the *ERJ*. She will be remembered for her major role in that achievement, as well as for her honesty and integrity.

She leaves a partner, Julian Taylor, and a married daughter, Melanie Thompson.