

An interview with Tony Egan, Focus on Health Professional Education (FoHPE) Editor and winner of the ANZAHPE Prize in 2012

The ANZAHPE Journal, affectionately known as FoHPE (“foe pee”) is an independent volunteer-produced peer-reviewed academic journal providing one of the few such educational journals that cater for all health professions. The Editor of the journal is Tony Egan who last year was awarded our prestigious ANZAHPE Award for service to the association and contribution to research in medical education, and of course to express the value and esteem we hold for Tony.

Recently I interviewed Tony about his role as Editor during a time of great upheaval for the publishing industry generally. Tony Egan hails from University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand. He took over as Editor of ANZAHPE’s journal from Ken Jones at the end of 2007 but has a long association with ANZAHPE including six years as Bulletin Editor prior to taking on FoHPE.

He recalls his first conference (ANZAME as it was then) was in Auckland 1989. *“I will always remember that conference. It was incredibly friendly, although there was a lot of pressure to participate in the bush dance that served as an ice-breaker. I recall the band were amazed at how motivated and skilled we (were). I think they were used to clumsy and inebriated hopefuls and instead they got fit, rhythmic enthusiasts who danced the night away.”* What particularly struck him about that conference was the lack of formality and hierarchy and the general openness, which had great appeal.

Since then the thing he has enjoyed most about ANZAHPE is *“the companionship and stimulation of our conferences, the relative lack of competitiveness and willingness to listen to new ideas”*. He also values the mix of professions with less hierarchy than might be expected with medicine alone. *“In the early days (as a psychologist) fitting into a Medical School it was my refuge and support – there was a time when psychologists were more like visitors from another planet than colleagues.”*

Recalling the genesis of FoHPE Tony recalls he was initially opposed to the idea of an association journal seeing it as too big an undertaking *“but once it was clear that we were going ahead I became a supporter”* So why did Tony take on the role of Editor? It seems that ironically this was the wages of doing a good job as Bulletin Editor for 6 years. *“I retired as the editor of the Bulletin (and) I was asked to take over from Ken Jones. I’d just finished six years in that role and was a bit reluctant, but CoM was keen.” “To be honest it was the pressure.”*

CoM clearly knew the right person for the job and despite the significant hours required Tony reports he has gotten much of value from being Editor beyond credits for his ‘Evidence Portfolio’, which is part of the Performance Based Research Funding regime that NZ academics have to endure. He particularly values access to the World Association of Medical Editors and participating in interesting and important debates. *“Personally, I enjoy the interactions with members of the Editorial Board and the workshops at the annual conference.”* Being FoHPE Editor has allowed Tony to consider a lot of issues around academic publishing and philosophical questions about what ‘evidence’ means and the importance of theory in the wider context of research.

Tony’s focus as Editor is to nurture a community of enquiry. His current goals are to achieve indexing of the journal, important for academic advancement in the current higher education climate, and he looks forward to being able to process manuscripts in a timely manner while retaining the ability to give authors quality feedback. He sees FoHPE as particularly important in

developing new authors in the region, while providing a place for high quality manuscripts and reports of innovative practice and from a range of health professional educators. Tony sees these two; an accessible quality regional journal and a good reviewing process to support development, as the key value of the Journal to ANZAHPE members. And therein lays the challenge for FoHPE and ANZAHPE. *"We need to maintain a membership sufficient to support and extend our current activities such as publishing the journal and to continue building mutual respect and keeping open the lines of communication between different professions."*

So how much time does it take to be FoHPE Editor? Tony conservatively estimates that overall he gives one full day per week to FoHPE but it ebbs and flows so flexibility of the day job is important. It helps that he is a part-time academic. He wryly observes that some weeks he works 5 days for 3 days' pay, and sometimes due to academic work demands FoHPE becomes the weekend job. A typically thoughtful person, he reflects that what time he takes up in carefully thinking things through he probably saves in preventing the crisis that too-quick decision-making can precipitate.

His academic work in the medical school very much informs his role as editor. *"My School work is split between development, policy and programmes, and delivery – I have to coordinate assessments in the early learning programme. This means that I bring to FoHPE some understanding of the theoretical side of educational process but it's always qualified by my recognition of the realities of implementation. I think that's probably a good combination for the editorial job. I also read a great deal of published research."*

Tony believes his past experience as a clinician is also useful as Editor. *"Many years ago I worked as a psychologist in a large psychiatric hospital." "I maintained an interest in cognitive psychology and that proved useful when the PBL pandemic broke out and now it feeds into lots of things like clinical reasoning."* New interests that intrigue Tony include cognitive anthropology and ideas about distributed thinking. *"I like to think I'm open-minded but that's really for others to judge. I certainly have my passions but I try to stop them influencing me too much in my role as editor."*

So what does it take to be a good editor? Tony reflects that a good editor should be well-informed generally and even-handed, but not without opinion. There is definitely a need for diplomacy. In his view the key to the role is the vision *"In FoHPE's case there are two aspects to that vision – the aspiration to be of international standard and the desire to nurture a community of enquiry. The two don't always sit together neatly so a good editor must find a balance or, possibly, change the vision."*

His advice to would be future FoHPE Editors? *"Be prepared to make some sacrifices. Hone your diplomacy skills and listen carefully to what authors, reviewers and Board members say. Support the ANZAHPE office and try not to be too demanding."*