The *Eurosurveillance* reader survey – what's next?

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Eurosurveillance has just celebrated its 15th anniversary. Since 1996, various editorial teams have kept the journal thriving – improving it while maintaining its strengths. Ad hoc personal feedback and discussions with our board members constituted the basis for most changes to the journal until 2010, when we felt that it was time for a more systematic approach. We wanted to know more about our readers' profiles, how satisfied they were with the journal and if it fulfilled their needs and those of the contributors (authors and reviewers). In addition, we wished to assess the relevance and usefulness of the journal for our audience and receive feedback on how we can improve. As a consequence, we conducted a reader satisfaction survey. It contained two parts: a questionnaire with 27 questions (26 closed, one open) was available on our website between 24 November and 23 December 2010 and was complemented by standardised in-depth interviews with 25 selected contributors.

A total of 459 readers responded to our questionnaire: 391 (85%) were subscribers. Together with the interviewees, they provided us with positive feedback, valuable comments and food for thought, leading us to conclude that our readers and contributors are satisfied overall with the journal.

A clearer profile of *Eurosurveillance* readers emerged from the responses: the majority were middle aged (age group 30–60 years: 80%; age group 40–60 years: 44%), worked in high managerial or executive positions (67%) and in epidemiology/public health of infectious diseases (50%). The second-largest professional group were microbiologists (20%). Respondents mainly came from the countries in Europe represented in our editorial board, while 22% were from North America, Australia, South America, Africa and Asia. Even if the self-selection of survey respondents could have led to bias, the profile is in line with that of our over 13,000 subscribers in terms of area of work and geographical origin. We thus think we now have a reliable image of those who subscribe to the journal in currently 110 countries. While the number of subscribers has increased overall, we noticed a slight shift towards Europe. In 1998, around 30% of the 2,177 subscribers to *Eurosurveillance* weekly came from other regions in

the world. The age distribution of our readers shows, that we can do better in younger age groups.

Once subscribed, our readers stay with the journal. Some 62% of respondents had been subscribed for over three years. More than half of the respondents read the journal at least once a week and used it often and for a variety of purposes in their work. The main reason for reading *Eurosurveillance* was its usefulness for daily work (81%). Personal education (80%) and using the information for research (42%), issuing recommendations (36%), teaching (33%) and clinical practice (14%) were also frequently mentioned.

An important finding from the survey was that surveillance and outbreak reports, along with the rapid communications, are considered to be the most valuable categories of our articles and cover what readers wish to see. We will certainly bear this in mind when commissioning, screening and selecting papers in the future.

Some improvements were suggested in the interviews: the need for better guidance for authors and reviewers, the functionality of the search engine, printer-friendly html texts, user-friendly layout, and the need for a submission system. We have taken these on board and have already implemented several changes in the past 12 months and others are in the pipeline. We have updated our editorial policy, provided more and clearer guidance for authors and reviewers and we are preparing a better search engine. Greater transparency will be introduced in the course of 2012 through an online submission system. This is part of our preparation for the time after we receive our first impact factor, in mid-2012. We are planning for an improved website with new functionalities, to be fully implemented after 2013.

Editorial independence from the publisher, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), was flagged up as an issue in both parts of the survey. We would like to point out that ECDC's director, Marc Sprenger, as well as his predecessor, Zsuzsanna Jakab, granted full editorial freedom to the journal from the start [1,2]. The evaluation of papers authored by ECDC employees is coordinated by our associate

editors and board members who do not have a direct connection with ECDC. This process is stated more explicitly in our editorial policy.

A minority of survey respondents and some interviewees commented on the varying level of quality of the articles we publish. Disparity in the geographical origin of the articles was also noted, and in the interviews, a clear message was voiced that *Eurosurveillance* should continue to provide capacity building and act as a platform for applied public health rather than focus on science only. These comments highlight our main challenge in the future. While we include (applied) science and ensure that all papers are of high quality, we also seek to support public health experts and scientists in countries with fewer resources, to enable them to share information with the wider community about relevant events and outbreaks. In fact, a geographical disparity is evident in the numbers of papers published in *Eurosurveillance*: countries from northern and western Europe dominate over time, although some countries from southern Europe have made a more prominent appearance recently.

Presenting timely information about ongoing outbreaks and relevant information on trends in infectious diseases from all European countries is one of our main goals and we work together with our supporters to achieve it. The fact that many of our readers are in senior positions, across the world, and use the journal in their everyday work highlights the opportunity for such information to be picked up and translated into public health action.

We thank all those who follow and take an interest in the journal and those who participated in the survey. Together with our contributors and supporters, we hope to improve the journal further and to be able to make a difference in public health. .

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