

R E C E N S I O N E

Creating Environmental and Occupational Health

By Derek R. Smith

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Academic journals play a decisive role in the development of a medical specialty, disseminating research findings and stimulating scientific debate. The historical analysis of the literature of Environmental and Occupational Health (EOH), a well-defined scientific field with a relatively small number of journals and a restricted community of specialized scholars, could provide precious information on the development and the progression of this discipline over time, highlighting some issues that are being still debated among scientists. Basing on these general considerations, Derek R. Smith, Professor of Environmental and Occupational Health at the University of Newcastle (New South Wales, Australia), conducted a very interesting historical and bibliometric analysis on some international journals of EOH, particularly focusing his attention on “Archives of Environmental & Occupational Health”.

The structure of the book is well conceived as it is divided into four interconnected chapters. Chapter 1 (“Historical development of academic journals in Environmental and Occupational Health”) describes the historical evolution of nine core international journals in the field of EOH with a detailed report on their origins. In particular, the author analyzes with accuracy the historical background of two US journals (the “Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine” and the “American Journal of Industrial Medicine”), five European periodicals (“Occupational and Environmental Medicine” and “Occupational Medicine (Oxford)”, United Kingdom, “La Medicina del Lavoro”, Italy, the “International Archives of Occupational and Environmental Health”, Germany and the “Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment & Health”) and two Japanese journals (the “Journal of Occupational Health” and “Industrial Health”). The careers and professional achievements of some distinguished editors-in-chief of these journals, such as Luigi Devoto (1864-1936), Donald Hunter

(1898-1978) and Irving J. Selikoff (1915-1992), are also investigated. Analysis of the history of these academic journals and of key-members of their editorial boards provides some interesting data on the history of EOH: for example, evidence that Occupational Medicine developed as a separate medical discipline during the 1940s-1950s, when industrial production increased due to World War II and the post-war recovery. It is worth mentioning that a section of this chapter traces the origins of “La Medicina del Lavoro”, which is the oldest regular periodical of EOH, originally founded in December 1901 as “Il Lavoro – Rivista di Fisiologia, Clinica ed Igiene del Lavoro”. The author reports in detail some biographical notes of the co-founders of *Med Lav*: Luigi Devoto, the first director of the “Clinica del Lavoro” in Milan, and the not so well known Carlo Moreschi (1876-1921). The information on the origins of these journals was collected also thanks to the collaboration of their current editors-in-chief and of various international scholars in the field of the history of EOH.

In Chapter 2 (“Historical development of the Archives of Environmental & Occupational Health”) the history of the oldest English-language journal of EOH, the “Archives of Environmental & Occupational Health” is traced in detail. This journal, originally founded in 1919 as the “Journal of Industrial Hygiene” by David L. Edsall (1869-1945) and Albert F. Stanley Kent (1863-1958), significantly contributed to the development of EOH in the US, especially in relation to air quality studies (e.g. the CHES studies during the 1970’s). In Chapters 3 and 4 “Archives of Environmental & Occupational Health” (the current title began in 2005) and its predecessor journals are also examined from a historical bibliometric perspective. In these sections the most frequently cited articles published in different periods, 1919-1960 and 1960-2004 respectively, were analyzed using data from two of the most well-known bibliome-

tric databases: the “Web of Science” by Thomson Reuters and “Scopus” by Elsevier (only for papers between 1919–1960). Citation trends in this journal, even if they may not necessarily reflect the development of EOH in that period, highlight some interesting findings, e.g., the fact that, unlike in other biomedical fields, the most frequently cited articles of this journal were not “methods” papers. On the basis of analysis of citation patterns the author concludes that EOH is a “boundary” discipline (“the nexus where many different fields meet”), also revealing some distinctive bibliometric characteristics.

This book represents an unusual and interesting review on the birth and development of the literature of Environmental and Occupational Health, providing useful information for the study of the origins of this medical discipline. In the last chapters of the book the use of bibliometrics demonstrates that this may be considered as an innovative and standardized tool for historians of medicine for understanding the “published history” of the science, in addition to providing quantitative indicators of performance and impact of academic journals. As far as I know, this is one of the first works to analyze the history of EOH from this original perspective. The target audience for this excellent new book consists of occupational health physicians, histo-

rians and bibliometric experts but it also has great relevance for current members of editorial boards of medical journals, since it could taken as a basis for reflection as regards the difficulties and problems of scientific literature. For example, the usefulness of bibliometric indicators (i.e. impact factor, H-index) is still debated in occupational medicine literature, as well as their validity and general relevance to the field.

In conclusion Derek Smith’s book reveals the importance of medical periodicals as a source for understanding the evolution of science, especially in the field of EOH. This concept is well summarized in the final words of the foreword to the book, written by Tee L. Guidotti, Past President of the “American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine”: “On one level, it [the journal literature of EOH] is a record of what we knew, how we did our work, and why decisions were made when they were based on evidence. On another level, it is a transcript of a never-ending conversation about justice in working life, what we feared, and how we took action to protect the vulnerable”.

M.A. Riva

University of Milano Bicocca

E-mail: michele.riva@unimib.it