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Editorial – December ...

by
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December is always an interesting time to consider what progress has been made in the year past. We have seen, once again, the Australian Defence Force heavily committed in our regional area, in East Timor and Bougainville; at home, with over 5,000 troops involved in ensuring Australia had a safe and unforgettable Olympic Games; and in planning for the future, with the release of the Defence White Paper. In all these areas, Defence health personnel have played important roles. 2001 is shaping up to be another year of challenge and change, with the ADF likely to have continued involvement in regional areas of concern, including East Timor. As we strive to cope with the increasing demands, above all we need to continue to retain our professionalism (and probably a sense of humour!).

As many of you may already know, I have recently taken over the job of Director of the Joint Health Support Agency. While still very early days, I can already appreciate the hard work that everybody is involved in throughout Australia. That includes not only the permanent and reserve health members, who have crucial roles both operationally and in support, but also the contract health practitioners who fill the gaps while our personnel are away on operational service and, without whom, many of our bases would not run. As part of my role as Director of JHSA, I'm looking forward to catching up with everybody in the New Year.

The year 2000 has also been an interesting year for military medicines and for the journal. As promised, we have increased the size and, I believe, range of articles in the journal and I hope to build on this progress in 2001. To achieve this aim, and as I would like the journal to be 80 pages per issue, *Australian Military Medicine* has a continuing need for a range of interesting articles and scientific papers from our readers and others interested in military medicine.

I would like to actively bring to your attention two of the AMMA prizes and awards provided by the Association. The first, the Journal Editor's Prize, is awarded by the Editor of Australian Military Medicine for the best paper published in the journal and is worth \$750. The 2000 prize went to Neil Westphalen for his two-part article on Australia's involvement in the Boxer Rebellion. The second is the essay prize, which for 2000 was unawarded. The topic for next year's Essay Prize is "*The future role of IT in military health*". I look forward to your contributions.

Whilst on contributions, I have a small challenge for the historians and literati out there. As one who has a keen interest in the historical use of biological weapons, I have been intrigued recently by their historical use in literature, particularly as a criminal act. Two stories come to mind, the first an Arthur Conan Doyle story,¹ in which the villain attempts to kill Sherlock Holmes using melioidosis. A later story, written by Sapper, details the attempted use of yellow fever infected mosquitoes to kill a Russian count.² I would be very interested in identifying the earliest stories in this genre and appreciate any help.

This particular issue of the Journal addresses some key psychological concerns that face us all as members of Defence Health Service Branch. The issue includes excellent papers on suicide in the ADF and post-traumatic stress disorder. We also have to some thought-provoking papers on operational fitness; one on the training required to get Australian Defence Force Academy cadets fit for their future military duties, the other on the impact of asthma on military service. From a military medical historical viewpoint, Major General Pearn looks at the first Australian military anaesthetist. In our viewpoint section, we have some

diverse papers on ageing and terrorism, lessons learnt and on the ethos of Saint Luke in military medical practice.

As we go into 2001, we farewell our Patron of the last three years, Major General John Pearn, who has been a stalwart in his support of AMMA, its Journal and its aims, and we welcome Air Vice-Marshal Bruce Short as our new Patron. We look forward to working with him over the next few years. Best Wishes for 2001.