The history of the *International Journal of Technology Assessment in Health Care*

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**BACKGROUND**

The 1970s and early 1980s was the period in which high technology medicine became dominant. It had begun in the late 1950s with the introduction of effective artificial respiratory technology. This gave physicians, patients, and families the hope that the threats to fundamental life processes such as breathing could be countered by technology, and the dilemma of both meeting its costs and the ethical challenges of how to remove it when its use no longer produced benefits.

Other technologies soon joined the respirator as high-cost agents of care such as the artificial kidney (1960s), the computerized tomography scanner (CT) in 1972, and nuclear magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) in 1977. In addition to such significant inventions, technological health care was supported by an array of other technologies with more modest costs which, nonetheless, exerted large effects on the nature and cost of practice. These included the numerous laboratory tests, which automated analyzers permitted to be ordered in groups of twenty to forty at a time, as well as a large increase in pharmaceutical products claimed to be effective in treating the functional and pathological aspects of illness.

During the 1970s and into the early 1980s, national institutions in the United States were forming to study and issue reports on how society should apply and pay for these innovations, most notably the Office of Technology Assessment (OTA) at the U.S. Congress, and the National Center for Health Care Technology, established in the federal government and directed by Seymour Perry.

At this time, informal discussions took place among different groups of people about the need of a forum for exchange of ideas in the field. In 1979, Egon Jonsson organized the first international conference on HTA in Stockholm, Sweden (2). Tore Schersten, a Swede who was later the President of the International Society for Technology Assessment in Health Care (ISTAHC), was chairman of the conference. Participants in the conference included Johannes Vang, David Banta, and Per Buch Andreasen. Schersten, Banta, and Buch Andreasen were all subsequently elected President of ISTAHC. More than thirty participants from several countries, including Sweden, the United States, Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, Finland, and Switzerland took part in the conference. At this conference, the first discussions began about the necessity to have active and structured international contacts for the field of HTA.

Subsequently, David Banta, working at OTA, developed a series of papers on how healthcare technology was being dealt with in nine countries. The publication of these papers led to a Rockefeller Foundation-funded “Bellagio Conference” in 1980 that made it possible for further international contacts to be made (1). In addition to Banta, Jonsson, Clyde Behney, and others already working in HTA, representatives of the World Health Organization and the World Bank took part.

**THE SORCERER’S APPRENTICE**

One of the recommendations of the Bellagio conference was that OTA start a newsletter on HTA, which was launched in January 1981, under the editorship of Clyde Behney. The name, The Sorcerer’s Apprentice was chosen “…to imply the immense, seemingly magical power that technology can possess.”

The newsletter was private, with a subscription cost of $12 a year, and it was published 3 times a year. By 1983, the newsletter had grown to thirty pages and had ten network correspondents from nine countries. It contained both overviews...
of technology assessments, and personal commentary in the form of writing and cartoons about the use and effects of technologies. The Sorcerer’s Apprentice can rightly claim honors as the first regular publication in the technology assessment field.

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF TECHNOLOGY ASSESSMENT IN HEALTH CARE

The success of The Sorcerer’s Apprentice, along with growing international interest in HTA, led directly to a discussion about the need for a scientific journal to assess healthcare technology at the same time as there was an agreement of the need for an international society in the field. The main individuals participating in devising ways to bring together the international technology assessment community at this time included David Banta, Clyde Behney, Tore Schersten, Johannes Vang, Ruth Hanft, Seymour Perry, Miriam Orleans, Barbara Stocking, Norman Weissman, Bernard Bloom, Egon Jonsson, and Stanley Reiser.

When Stanley Reiser and Egon Jonsson first met, at Harvard University in 1982, they discussed the prospects of launching an international scientific journal on technology assessment in health care. Because Reiser recently had published the book *Medicine and the Reign of Technology*, with Cambridge University Press in New York (4), he approached the Press about their interest in publishing such a journal.

An agreement was quickly made with Cambridge University Press and its supportive American Director, Barbara Colson (who by coincidence had been considering the need for such a publication), to produce a journal, and Jonsson and Reiser began their work in organizing the Journal’s function the same year. The first task was creating an Editorial Board. Its major challenge was melding the need to gain representation from countries with established or nascent assessment activities, with the requirement of having as members the best available individuals in the field who also were willing to give time to the Journal. Our expectations were met on both counts as the composition of the Journal’s first Board shows (Table 1). The current Editorial Board of the Journal includes representatives of twenty-two countries, and of WHO (Table 2).

Task two was deciding basic purpose and content. We recognized that the Journal must serve the critical functions of not only encouraging the best possible analysis of the issues facing health technology assessment, but of also bringing together its far-flung constituents and forging a community of them. These purposes critically shaped its content. For we needed articles that had not only scholarly excellence but also portrayed the viewpoints and values that shaped technology assessment in all parts of its international constituency. Achieving a balance between these two requirements at times made for difficult judgments.

Over the years, the Journal has grown substantially from a couple of hundred subscribers, to the circulation of today of approximately 4,000 including online subscriptions. “An impressive amount of scholarly articles in the field of health technology assessment has been published in these years; approximately 2,000 manuscripts, authored by approximately 6,000 people, covering more than 20,000 printed pages in close to 100 issues. The Journal has contributed greatly to the development of the field of HTA.” (3).

A unique feature of the Journal that proved to be significant was in-depth, multiple-essay analyses of key issues and developments in the field, put together by guest editors and overseen by the editors-in-chief. They were soon titled “Special Sections,” and appeared in the Journal from its first Volume in 1985 until 2002. At times, their scope was so large that it was necessary to publish an additional issue of the Journal to hold their content. In all, forty-eight Special Sections were produced, whose subjects ranged from assessing how technology could effectively aid the elderly not only to be healthy but to live independently, to how different countries organized assessment activities and influenced their nation’s policies (Table 3).

In the 25-year history of the Journal, begun in 1985, it has had a close relationship with the International Society of Technology Assessment in Health Care (ISTAHC) and later with Health Technology Assessment International (HTAi). The ISTAHC was formed a year after the Journal’s creation, and made the Journal its official publication. Indeed after several years of independent existence, all Society memberships included the price of a Journal subscription. Clearly, the Journal represented the Society not only to its members, many of whom published articles within it, but also to the world at large.

During this long association, there have been at times questions raised by the Society about the Journal’s independence. Some argued for the society’s control of the publication, because it was designated as its official public scholarly organ. Legally, of course, the issue is nondebatable. Cambridge University Press owns the Journal. Practically the Society’s history, particularly as it ran into financial difficulties in 2002, showed the advantage of a separate ownership. Intellectually, the greatest danger facing any journal is becoming what historians call a “court” publication. This is the peril of the representatives of the organization owning and funding a journal unduly influencing its content and editorial board judgments. That the Society continues to favor such ownership and editorial separation augers well for the Journal’s future.

Our service to the Society and the growing community that reads the pages of the Journal, and our work and friendships over the years with Editorial Board members and authors have been highlights of our professional careers and personal lives. That the Journal shall continue to flourish is a hope we hold deeply.
Table 1. Editorial Board of the *International Journal of Technology Assessment in Health Care* 1985

**Editors**

Egon Jonsson, PhD  
Professor, The Karolinska Institute and Spri, Stockholm, Sweden

Stanley J. Reiser, MD, PhD  
Professor, Program on Humanities and Technology in Health Care, The University of Texas, Health Science Center at Houston, Houston, Texas, USA

**Associate Editors**

Geza Adam  
Ministry of Health of the Hungarian People’s Republic, Budapest, Hungary

Michael Anbar, PhD  
Professor, Department of Biophysical Sciences, State University of New York at Buffalo, Buffalo, New York, USA

H. David Banta, MD, PhD  
Consultant, World Health Organization, The Hague, Netherlands

Clyde Behney  
Health Program Manager, Office of the Technology Assessment, Congress of the United States, Washington, DC, USA

Jan E. Blanpain, MD  
Professor, Department of Hospital Administration and Medical Care Organization, Leuven, Belgium

Paul F. Gross  
Director, Institute of Health Economics and Technology Assessment, North Sydney, Australia

Ruth S. Hanft  
Health Policy Consultant, Washington, DC, USA

John Hutton  
Senior Research Fellow, University of York, York, England

Pia M. Jonsson, MD  
The Karolinska Institute, The Karolinska Hospital, Stockholm, Sweden

Samuel Korper, PhD  
Associate Director for Legislation, National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, Maryland, USA

Seymour Perry, MD  
Deputy Director, Institute for Health Policy Analysis, Georgetown University Medical Center, Washington, DC, USA

Tore Schersten, MD, PhD  
Dean, Faculty of Medicine, University of Goteborg, Department of Surgery, Goteburg, Sweden

Barbara Stocking  
Fellow, King’s Fund College, London, England

Johannes Vang, MD, PhD  
Regional Officer of Health Technology Assessment, World Health Organization, Copenhagen, Denmark

Norman Weissman, PhD  
Director, Division of Extramural Research, National Center for Health Services Research and Health Care Technology Assessment, Rockville, Maryland, USA

**Editorial Board**

Faye G. Abdeliah, RN, EdD, ScD  
Deputy Surgeon General, Chief Nurse Officer, US Public Health Service, Rockville, Maryland, USA

Tetsuzu Akutsu  
Deputy President, National Cardiovascular Center, Osaka, Japan

Per Buch Andreasen, MD, PhD  
Department of Gastroenterology and Clinical Pharmacology, Gentofte University Hospital, Hellerup, Denmark

John R. Ball, MD, JD  
Associate Vice President, American College of Physicians, Washington, DC, USA

Jeremiah A. Barondess, MD  
Professor, Cornell University Medical College, New York, New York, USA

Aldo Bujevic  
Professor, Zagreb Institute of Public Health, Zagreb, Yugoslavia

John P. Bunker, MD  
Professor, School of Medicine, Stanford University, Stanford, California, USA
Table 1. Continued

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position, Institution</th>
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<tr>
<td>Carlos Canitrot</td>
<td>Sub-Secretario de Regulacion y Control, Ministerio de Salud Publica, Y Medio Ambiente de Argentina, Buenos Aires, Argentina</td>
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<td>Dr. Hesio Cordeira</td>
<td>Professor, Universidad Federal de Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil</td>
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<td>Henry Danielsson, MD</td>
<td>Professor, Secretary General, The Swedish Medical Research Council, Stockholm, Sweden</td>
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<td>Luigi Donato, MD</td>
<td>Professor, Instituto di Fisiologia Clinica CNR, Pisa, Italy</td>
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<td>Robert Evans, PhD</td>
<td>Professor, Department of Economics, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia,</td>
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<td>Uwe Faust</td>
<td>Professor, University of Stuttgart, Institute for Biomedical Technology, Federal Republic of Germany</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jose Laguna Garcia</td>
<td>Secretaria de Salubridad y Asistencia de Mexico, Mexico City, Mexico</td>
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<td>L.M.J. Groot</td>
<td>Professor, Faculty of Medicine, Riksuniversiteit Limburg, Maastricht, Netherlands</td>
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<td>David Gunnarsson</td>
<td>Managing Director, Rikisspitalar, Reykjavik, Iceland</td>
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<td>Peter F. Hjort, MD</td>
<td>Professor, National Institute of Public Health, Oslo, Norway</td>
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<td>Bruno Horisberger</td>
<td>Director, Center for Public Health, St. Gallen, Switzerland</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bryan Jennett, MD</td>
<td>Dean, Faculty of Medicine, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, Scotland</td>
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<td>Kirsten Staehr Johansen, MD</td>
<td>DDS, Regional Officer for Appropriate Technology for Health, World Health Organization, Copenhagen, Denmark</td>
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<td>Jean Francoise la Cronique, MD</td>
<td>Professor, Rue de Leningrad 17, Paris, France</td>
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<td>Professor Lechaim Naggan, MD, DrPH</td>
<td>Dr. Herman Kessel Professor of Epidemiology, BGU Center for Health Services, Beer Sheva, Israel</td>
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<td>Duncan Neuhauser, PhD</td>
<td>Professor, Department of Community Health, School of Medicine, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio, USA</td>
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<td>Miriam Orleans, PhD</td>
<td>Professor, Department of Preventive Medicine and Biometrics, University of Colorado, Health Sciences Center, Denver, Colorado, USA</td>
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<td>Dr. Masamitso Osima</td>
<td>President, The Medical Information System, Development Center, Tokyo, Japan</td>
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<td>Frederick C. Robbins, MD</td>
<td>President, Institute of Medicine, National Academy of Sciences, Washington, DC, USA</td>
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<td>Steven Schroeder, MD</td>
<td>Professor, Division of General Internal Medicine, University of California, School of Medicine, San Francisco, California, USA</td>
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<td>Henry Troupp, MD</td>
<td>PhD, Department of Neurosurgery, Topeliusgatan 5, Helsinki, Finland</td>
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<td>A.H. Wilfried Wahba, PhD</td>
<td>World Health Organization, Copenhagen, Denmark</td>
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<td>Francisco J. Yepes, MD</td>
<td>PhD, Secretario General, Ministerio de Salud, Bogota, Columbia</td>
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Table 2. Country Representation on the Editorial Board of the International Journal of Technology Assessment in Health Care as of 2009

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<th>Country</th>
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<td>United Kingdom</td>
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<td>Vietnam</td>
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Table 3. ISTAHC Journal Special Sections (1985 to 2002)

1985

Special Section: Technology and Health Care For the Elderly
Volume 1, Number 1, 1985
Guest Editors: Alvar Svanborg, Barbara Stocking

Special Section: Advanced Technology and Health Care in the Home
Volume 1, Number 2, 1985
Guest Editor: Jan E. Blanpain

Special Section: An International View of Magnetic Resonance – Imaging and Spectroscopy
Volume 1, Number 3, 1985
Guest Editors: Tore Scherstén, Jane E. Sisk

Special Section: The Technology of Prenatal Care
Volume 1, Number 4, 1985
Guest Editors: H. David Banta, Susanne Houd, Elbio Suarez Ojeda

1986

Special Section: Technology Assessment: Policy, Clinical, and Methodological Issues
Volume 2, Number 1, 1986
Guest Editors: Henry Danielsson, Itzhak Jacoby, Johannes Vang

Special Section: The Cultural Shaping of Biomedical Science and Technology
Volume 2, Number 2, 1986
Guest Editor: Renée J. Fox

Special Section: Transplantation and Artificial Organs
Volume 2, Number 3, 1986
Guest Editors: John P. Bunker, Bryan Jennett

Special Section: The Evaluation of Drugs: An International Perspective
Volume 2, Number 4, 1986
Guest Editors: Louis Lasagna, Lars Werko

1987

Special Section: Educating Practitioners in the Appropriate Use of Technology
Guest Editors: Jeremiah A. Barondess, John Lister
Volume 3, Number 1, 1987
Table 3. Continued

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Special Section: The Organization and Use of Technology in the Hospital</th>
<th>Part I: Social, Economic, and Political Issues</th>
<th>Guest Editors: Jerome H. Grossman, Bruno Horisberger</th>
<th>Volume 3, Number 2, 1987</th>
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<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Special Section: Technology Assessment and the Alteration of Medical Practices</td>
<td>Guest Editors: Henry Danielsson, Itzhak Jacoby, Johannes Vang</td>
<td>Volume 4, Number 1, 1988</td>
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<td>2009</td>
<td>Special Section: Assessing the Technology of Physical Therapy</td>
<td>Guest Editors: Nancy T. Watts, Margareta af Klinteberg</td>
<td>Volume 8, Number 1, 1992</td>
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### Table 3. Continued

**Special Section: Intensive Care: Where are We?**  
Guest Editors: Bernard S. Bloom, Dag Lundberg  
Volume 8, Number 3, 1992

**Special Section: Orphan Technologies**  
Guest Editor: Judith Wagner  
Volume 8, Number 4, 1992

1993  
**Special Section: Industry and the Generation of Technology**  
Guest Editor: Jerome Grossman  
Volume 9, Number 2, 1993

**Special Section: Industry and the Generation of Technology, Part II**  
Guest Editor: Jerome Grossman  
Volume 9, Number 3, 1993

1994  
**Special Section: Vaccines and Public Health: Assessing Technologies and Public Policies**  
Guest Editors: Phyllis Freeman, Regina Rabinovich, Anthony Robbins  
Volume 10, Number 1, 1994

**Special Section: Assessing Nursing and Technology**  
Guest Editors: Mary Mundinger, Duncan Neuhauser  
Volume 10, Number 2, 1994

**Special Section: Technology Assessment in Japan**  
Guest Editors: Naoki Ikegami, Akinori Hisashige  
Volume 10, Number 3, 1994

**Special Section: Genetic Technology**  
Guest Editors: Frederick C. Robbins, Arno G. Motulsky, Thomas H. Murray  
Volume 10, Number 4, 1994

1995  
**Special Section: Technology and Disability**  
Guest Editors: John Hutton, Jan Persson  
Volume 11, Number 2, 1995

**Special Section: The Rational Use of Therapeutic Drugs**  
Guest Editors: John P. Bunker, Peter F. Carpenter, Philip R. Lee  
Volume 11, Number 3, 1995

**Special Section: Needs-Based Technology Assessment: Who Can Afford Not to Use It?**  
Guest Editors: Yves Bergevin, Peter Tugwell  
Volume 11, Number 4, 1995

1996  
**Special Section: The Quality of the Medical Evidence: Is It Good Enough?**  
Section Editors: Kay Dickersin, Andrew Herxheimer  
Volume 12, Number 2, 1996

**Special Section: The Assessment of Psychiatry**  
Guest Editor: Claes-Goran Westrin  
Volume 12, Number 4, 1996

1997  
**Special Section: Report From the Eur-Assess Project Eur-Assess**  
Coordinator: H. David Banta  
Volume 13, Number 2, 1997

**Special Section: The Use and Abuse of Low Cost Technologies**  
Section Editor: Jeremiah A. Barondess  
Volume 13, Number 4, 1997

1998  
**Special Section: The Consumer and Technology**  
Section Editor: Jane E. Sisk  
Volume 14, Number 1, 1998

**Special Section: Early Identification and Assessment of Emerging Health Technology**  
Section Editors: Per Carlsson and Torben Jorgensen  
Volume 14, Number 4, 1998
Table 3. Continued

1999

Special Section: Assessing Reproductive Technology
Section Editors: Miriam Orleans, Elina Hemminki
Volume 15, Number 1, 1999

2000

Special Section: Health Technology Assessment in the European Union
Section Editors: David Banta, Wija Oortwijn
Volume 16, Number 2, 2000

Special Section: Clinical Practice Guidelines in the 21st Century
Section Editor: J. Jaime Caro
Volume 16, Number 4, 2000

2001

Special Section: Bayesian Approaches to Technology Assessment and Decision Making
Section Editors: Bryan R. Luce, Ya-Chen Tina Shih, Karl Claxton
Volume 17, Number 1, 2001

Special Section: Health Policy, Health Technology Assessment, and Screening in Europe
Section Editors: H. David Banta, Wija Oortwijn, Richard Cranovsky
Volume 17, Number 3, 2001

2002

Special Section: National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) – Symposium on Technology Assessment
Section Editors: Rod Taylor, David Barnett
Volume 18, Number 2, 2002

Special Section: Reports of the ECHTA/ECAHI Project
Section Editors: Egon Jonsson, H. David Banta, Chris Henshall, Laura Sampietro-Colom
Volume 18, Number 2, 2002

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