The mapping of human genes has been an important step in the development of medicines and other aspects of health care, emphasized by the worldwide interest in the Human Genome Project that began in 1990 in the United States at the National Institutes of Health. It is with this deep respect for the profound importance of genetics that we are proud to present our newest issue of the University of Western Ontario Medical Journal. Case reports, reviews, and in-depth discussions cover a variety of topics on this fascinating theme. Major implications for the future, present and past underlie each of these articles.

The future is a focal point of both speculation and hope when it comes to the detection of blood vessel anomalies and microvascular disease, as described in an enlightening article within the Clinical Procedures departmental section herein. Prenatal genetic diagnosis helps us predict the future of an unborn child, as highlighted in a feature article in this issue. Meanwhile, on a broader scale, the endless possibilities behind the cutting edge technology in personalized cancer management are also explored in the Medicine and Technology departmental section. A feature article discusses how our seemingly innocuous current environmental exposures can even affect our future generations!

And yet, despite all its predictive power, genetic diseases continue to burden society in the present time. What are the implications of long QT syndrome on quality of life? What role does genetics play for patients diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis? How should we screen for hemochromatosis? Our authors address these issues. Far more uncommon conditions, such as fibrodysplasia ossificans progressa, can be detected early with genetic screening today, as described in the Zebra Files. Our Interdisciplinary Collaboration authors weigh in on the necessity of support when it comes to Huntington’s Disease. But the follies of genetics are also addressed – what does it mean to label one another as ill or healthy, particularly when it comes to alcoholism? This dilemma is eloquently outlined in our Health Promotion departmental article.

It is also essential to look back in time. Our contributors do not forget to take an in depth look at the past. As our History of Medicine departmental article demonstrates, genetic research has affected indigenous peoples, and ethical considerations have arisen from historical challenges, leading to stricter implementation of informed consent principles today.

Genetics connects all of humanity, from past to present to future, and underscores the similarities and differences between us all. Understanding our past allows us to plan for the future. The recent period of volatility for the University of Western Ontario Medical Journal is highlighted in this issue, with a reflection piece that addresses the major changes that have occurred within the journal’s structure, operations, and content, ultimately producing the impressive collection of quality articles that you see now.

We hope that you find this issue relevant in looking towards the future, keeping up with the present, and understanding the past when it comes to genetics and its wide-ranging impacts. Enjoy!

- Wendy Ng and Amber Menezes
  Editors-in-chief
A Bump in the Road for the UWOMJ

In 2005, the University of Western Ontario Medical Journal had not printed an actual issue in two years, despite its long, successful history as Canada’s second oldest medical student journal. At that point, the only printed issue that had been distributed in recent memory was the Obstetrics and Gynecology issue. Meanwhile, the Pediatrics issue had been laid out in full — with cover art, student articles and advertisements included — but there were no funds for printing, nor a printing service set up. However, there were still bills to be paid for the layout of the Pediatrics issue. At the same time, some articles had already been collected for the History of Medicine issue, but there was no realistic plan in place for the issue to go forward.

My four years as the managing editor of the UWOMJ have been extremely rewarding. When I both started medical school and joined the UWOMJ in 2005, the position of “Managing Editor” was newly created and loosely defined — my original job description was merely to implement a peer or faculty review process for student articles — but I learned quickly there was so much more to be done, and I vastly expanded my role.

The company that had taken care of UWOMJ’s layout, printing and distribution in previous years reportedly went bankrupt and fled North America. My phone calls and emails were not returned. The UWOMJ was caught unprepared in a confusing state of affairs. Many students were frequently asking me when their articles would be printed and questioning when the next issues would be coming out. Multiple advisors recommended to me that I should simply put a stop to printing the journal at all, and that I resort to online copies only. But this was not an acceptable answer to me — it was of utmost importance that the UWOMJ remain in print.

It was with this realization that I began to seek out alternatives for both advertising and printing. Individually soliciting advertisements for the journal was not at all an easy task — I came to this discovery through trial and error. I contacted CU Advertising, and with the help of my colleague Renata Villela, we signed our first contract with them for the Oncology issue. At the same time, I looked for a new printing company. I visited several, collecting proofs and comparing prices, before I finally decided to work with Imprint. I was confident that their staff would ensure that the journal was printed to our high standards.

The Oncology issue was the first edition of the UWOMJ to accept only articles reviewed and approved by faculty at UWO. Recruiting contributors was a challenge in itself, and I designed an original new layout for the issue. I contacted dozens of faculty in 2005, asking them to join our faculty review board. Articles that did not meet rigorous review standards were rejected. I designed and sent out a peer review form to reviewers and requested countless revisions from authors. I acted as a mediator between all authors and reviewers to maintain absolute anonymity in the process.

Finally, I needed a new process for distribution of the journal. I put together a long list of mailing addresses, and we had our first “mailing label sticker party” in the UWOMJ office. Amber and I carried the journals down to the mailroom, and the bulk of our very first new journals were on their way!

However, a sustainable structure for the UWOMJ was sorely needed. Renata offered to take care of the contracts, while I worked on the journal itself. This was how the two divisions of the Editorial Board of the journal were born: Renata took charge of the Contracts and Awards
Division, while I headed up the Managerial stream. The backlogged Pediatrics and History of Medicine issues were published online.

When Amber Menezes helped collect articles for the subsequent Family Medicine issue, authors were responsible for ensuring that their articles were indeed reviewed and approved by UWO physician faculty members before submission. This process has proven sustainable and has maintained the high quality of articles appearing in the UWOMJ.

The first online summer supplement of the UWOMJ was put together by Stephen Chihrin in 2005. This has become an annual tradition. Tiffany Kwok continued to produce the summer supplement and put together the Cardiovascular issue, our first alternatively funded issue. She also ensured that the UWOMJ office was clean and in a functional state for our editorial staff – a massive task, given the mess that it was in before!

Renata instituted some amazing new changes for the UWOMJ. Recently, she has spearheaded the process for the UWOMJ to be catalogued by PubMed. Notably, she suggested that we recognize our writers’ and artists’ talents and hard work with departmental and feature article awards, as well as cover art awards. We had our first Awards meeting in the early summer of 2008. Dr. Faisal Rehman, who has been our most active faculty supporter from our rocky start, provided much-appreciated food and encouragement for this first meeting, and generously funded the awards.

We are incredibly lucky to have a remarkable editorial team taking on the immensely rewarding and challenging experience of running the UWOMJ. Laura Hinz organized our first Awards Ceremony, where plaques were presented to very deserving winning contributors. She also initiated the creation of the new Interdisciplinary Collaboration department of the medical journal, reflecting the growing multidisciplinary nature of health care today.

It has been unmistakably clear that the transition into sustainable operations has progressed spectacularly. We are fortunate to have an extraordinary group working on ensuring that the UWOMJ continues its high-quality publishing and distribution, while consistently exceeding our readership’s expectations. The graduating students of the UWO Medicine Class of 2009 have seen our medical journal recover dramatically over the past few years from its lowest point in 2005. I eagerly look forward to following the journal as a UWO alumnus, with such a capable new editorial team at the lead!

Wendy Ng
Managing Editor-in-chief