

# From the Editor

## On journalism, the Nobel Peace Prize, and the paths we travel by

The road to a Nobel Prize is not easy and journalist Maria Ressa can attest to that. I am both awed and inspired by her journey and find it fitting to pay tribute to her achievement in this issue on medical journalism. I must admit I am biased due to several reasons. Not only was she the first Nobel laureate of Filipino ancestry, she was also the sole female recipient in 2021. And she knows science.

Maria is not a medical writer, she is an investigative journalist, a human rights advocate, and a climate activist. But she started her tertiary education in biology before shifting to journalism and theatre. Her famous quote, “Don’t be afraid – if you don’t exercise your rights, you will lose them”, may sound political, but I read evolutionary biology between the lines.

Maria is a strong opponent of the weaponisation of social media. She calls out tech giants, especially Facebook, and seeks redress for the ongoing infodemic. Her continuing battle against misinformation and disinformation (“... so a lie told a million times becomes a fact...”) resonates in our struggle as medical communications professionals to defend science in a highly skeptical world. “The virus of lies is highly contagious. They infect real people, who become impervious to facts. It changes the way they look at the world. They become angrier, more isolated. They distrust everything.”<sup>1</sup>

Maria’s journey from life science to writing underlines the importance of the choices we make in life. Too often “two roads diverge... and sorry [we] couldn’t travel both.”<sup>2</sup>

This brings back memories of my own journey when I received that life-changing letter at age 16 offering a full scholarship at the state university hundreds of kilometers away. Based on my test results, my aptitude gauge pointed me to major in either science or English. I chose Biology.

The second crossroads came 10 years later as a fax message. Should I pursue a master’s programme in Japan or Belgium? I chose Europe.

And though “one way leads on to way,”<sup>2</sup> I did go back. Fifteen years later, I reached the next junction and had to choose between academia



and industry. Only this time the two roads converged in medical writing. I felt like I had come full circle – I need not choose between science and English anymore. I even wrote an article about it.<sup>3</sup>

So here we are, another 15 years hence.

I never imagined the impact that article made. As many life scientists reach their point of divergence, they reach out to me for tips on how to go “from academia to medical writing.”<sup>3</sup> I used to keep track,<sup>4</sup> but I have stopped counting. There was no secret map, just a combination of luck, determination, and patience. I am glad that many found their own path and made similar transitions.

In our life and career journeys, only a very select few will be honoured with a Nobel Prize. Despite our job title, a medical writer is highly unlikely to win the Nobel Prize for Medicine or Literature. But many of us have successful and fulfilling careers based on the choices we made.

I do not fully know Maria’s journey and the motivations behind her decision to go from science to journalism. But to many of my fellow travelers on this road of life, here is another one of Maria’s quotes that I live by each time I reach another fork:

“All through my life, when faced with a difficult decision, I always ask myself – where can I learn more? Make the choice to learn.”<sup>5</sup>

By awarding the Nobel Peace prize to two journalists, the committee highlights the importance of journalism and the responsibilities that come with the power of the pen. This issue contains an excellent collection of articles that supports this message. Thank you Evguenia Alechine and Phil Leventhal for putting this together.

Finally, I would like to wholeheartedly thank Jennifer Simmons for her valuable contributions to the journal; she is stepping down as Section Editor of Regulatory Matters as she follows other pathways.

This is my fourth issue as editor-in-chief and marks 1 year since I took on this role.

To our members, readers, contributors, collaborators, and especially the editorial board members, thank you very much for all your support and trust this last year and I look forward to working with you in 2022.

### References

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