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# Editorial

It is now a year since I took over the European, African and near Eastern chief editorial chair from Pat D'Arcy and the office moved from its familiar home in Belfast to London. The first year has been a learning experience and there has been no attempt as yet to change what is, anyway, a successful formula. Successful it certainly is, with around 400 manuscripts being submitted each year to the London office alone. The editorial team in the School of Pharmacy, which comprises Professor Michael Newton as Editor, Dr Graham Buckton as Associate Editor and myself, has been gaining experience with the papers submitted to us. My two colleagues will be reflecting in print on their first year soon, Mike Newton having had 7 years of editing papers emanating from Scandinavia.

Some of my own impressions are as follows. These were gained partly over the last 12 months, but also from a previous incumbency in the editorial chair of the Journal of Drug Targeting and as an active scientist who publishes and knows the impact of an adverse referee's report.

A growing band of reviewers have provided valuable and timely opinions on submitted manuscripts. Most referees have been fair, but occasionally there is a recommendation to reject papers when it is our view that this is too harsh a fate. When any of us in the London office feel that there is bias or even carelessness in review, we will consider the case together. Fortunately, there has been little need for such conferences.

Some papers will be returned to authors without being submitted for review. This happens infrequently and we will always give our reasons. It may be that the paper does not fall within the purview of the journal, or it may be that the paper appears deficient in data or is repetitious of work known to us. The first category might include papers in the area of drug analysis where there is no 'pharmaceutics' element. We might recommend submission to a mainstream analytical journal, while of course recognising that good analytical technology and methodology is often vital for good research in pharmaceutics.

The last two categories for rejection plunge editors into even more contentious seas. I am struck as I go through the week's crop of papers (each perhaps the result of 1, 2 or 3 years work, most often by a research student) of the number which have little novelty. Each week we seem to receive papers on drug-cyclodextrin complexes or a study involving polylactide-glycolide microspheres which introduce no new concepts. They move the field forward, but imperceptibly. Science, of course, progresses incrementally. Most of our work fills in the detail after new discoveries that provide the quantal leaps are made. This is essential if subjects are to consolidate and if we are to discover anomalies or deviations from the new paradigms. If we are lucky ourselves we sometimes discover something completely new and then we, or others, get to work to flesh out the details, which of course should be published.

It has to be said that reviewers are sometimes more comfortable with the well trodden path than with new directions. Sometimes research funding agencies are too. In a commentary on the life of the insect physiologist, V.B. Wigglesworth, Lawrence and Lock (Nature 1997, 386, 757–758) wrote; "Journals can… limit originality. Apart from pandering to fashion, editors seem increasingly to be relinquishing what should be their decision to reviewers, and reviewers tend to dis-


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like competitors' hypotheses. Short, clear papers with unifying ideas, such as that of Watson and Crick, are out of fashion and detail is becoming confused with profundity." As Lawrence and Locke agree, "publication in science involves the art of telling a story".

I have recently been corresponding with the editors of another journal about a paper which I submitted from my group. This concerns the low number of animals we had used. Referees found this unsatisfactory, although the data showed the effect in question very clearly. One referee wanted us to do more experiments, to prove again the point. It would have taken a year to produce more material using a genetically engineered organism. We were in the throws of delay due to the application in our laboratories of guidelines for the use of genetically modified organisms. The paper has survived as a technical note, but not without some annoyance and two revisions. We are, therefore, aware of unreasonable demands.

Authors submitting to this journal are to be encouraged from now on to state in a letter accompanying their submission what is new about their findings or their treatment of data. Priority will be given to those papers whose authors can demonstrate a fresh idea or two. This is not simply so that the International Journal of Pharmaceutics can increase its impact but so that it can increase its value to readers. Such is the volume of material published each fortnight that there is the need for economy of language, of narrative, even of detail, especially if that detail obscures, as it sometimes does, the story being told.

We receive an encouraging number of papers from authors who are not native English speakers. We do our best to edit in the true sense of the word and Elsevier have desk editors who work on the papers, but it might be that soon we will have to insist on some authors submitting their paper to a native English speaker or specialist before putting it our way. Is this harsh? I don't think so. Greater clarity in the language of each paper will make each paper a delight rather than a chore to read. That should be our goal.

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