

Chemical Classification of Plants

Recently, a commentary appeared in the "Open Forum"¹ discussing a book review published in *J. Pharm. Sci.* [63, 1344(1974)]. As author of the review, I wish to deny the two implications stated in the commentary: "... the reviewer implies that review articles on plant antitumor agents may be confusing to the chemically (and not botanically) oriented reader and that chemically oriented reviews in this area are not available."

As to the first, the intended implication, which is apparent to me after reading the review, is that of all the articles published on naturally occurring substances (not only reviews and not just reviews on plant antitumor agents), most of them present data within a taxonomic framework and this may (perhaps not) be difficult reading for those whose training and experience are not botanically oriented. I readily acknowledge that the botanical classification approach well serves its purpose, and I made no suggestion to the contrary. However, I pointed out that the approach in this publication more closely represents a chemical classification than a taxonomic approach. I believe this is in keeping with the primary purpose of a book review, which is to describe the contents and methods of data presentation.

Second, in my judgment, there are no statements in the reviewer's comments that would in any way imply that chemically oriented reviews in this area are not available. Whether the reviewer was aware of chemically oriented reviews in this area is not a pertinent point, but can anyone with even a peripheral interest in plant antitumor agents not be aware of the work of Dr. S. M. Kupchan and some of the other authors listed by the commentary writers?

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¹ N. R. Farnsworth and G. A. Cordell, *J. Pharm. Sci.*, 63 (11), vi(1974).

Reviewing of Manuscripts

Some time ago the Editor of *J. Pharm. Sci.* asked for opinions on current review practices for manuscripts published in this Journal. Only a few individuals responded, and the opinions did not appear to be strong one way or another. Because our opinions were split on the issue, we did not feel that our remarks would contribute to the question.

However, a unique way of handling this problem is evidenced in the journal *Current Anthropology*. This process has been described in detail¹, but it would seem of interest to describe briefly the method used by this journal, and perhaps by others, for handling the review process of manuscripts.

Copies of the manuscript are sent to about 20 scholars whose data cards indicate their competence in the subject matter. They are asked to evaluate the manuscript in terms of accuracy, importance, and interest to the profession and to make suggestions for improvement. Their replies, analyzed by the editorial staff, provide a firm basis for a decision on the manuscript—whether it be accepted as it is or returned to the author so that he or she might take account of the suggestions from the referees or seek a more appropriate journal for the manuscript. These reviews are published immediately following the article in the journal and often amount to the length of a full manuscript themselves. The author then has the option to reply to these reviews, and such replies are published immediately following the reviews.

It seems to us that this is an amazingly simple and fair way of treating the "peer review" problem in which everyone has an opportunity to express his or her opinion. The major disadvantages are: (a) there would be an additional burden placed on the editorial staff of the journal, (b) a larger number of competent reviewers would be needed, who would be willing to respond rapidly so as to avoid delays in publication, and (c) publication of most articles would be somewhat delayed. The obvious advantages to this system are: (a) even though an article was judged inappropriate for publication, the author could still request publication knowing that the comments and analysis of the referees would be made known to the readership, and (b) the author would have an opportunity to rebut, in writing, the criticisms of the referees (if needed).

Obviously, the referees would have to be instructed to prepare reviews that would reflect a manuscript after being corrected for trivial errors. This type of a review system would perhaps markedly change the type of review received by the editor and would force some authors to be more careful in the preparation of their manuscripts.

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¹ *Curr. Anthropol.*, 13, 147(1972).