

## Editorial

As anyone who tries to keep up with the scientific literature will know, the information explosion shows no sign of abating. Journals such as this will certainly not be short of submitted papers for some time to come and even with a stringent refereeing procedure, the number of acceptable papers is outstripping the number of pages we have available. It is, of course, very gratifying that leading pharmaceutical scientists should wish to see their work in the *Journal of Pharmacy and Pharmacology*, as well as being reassuring that so much good work is being carried out. However, in the situation described above it is inevitable that a queue of papers will develop and authors may begin to feel that time from acceptance to publication starts to become unacceptable. It is this problem of times to publish that I wish to address in this editorial, with a view to enlisting the support of responsible authors in attaining timely publication of important research work.

Firstly, authors can help considerably in the rapid evaluation of their work by making sure that they submit papers in the form the journal, any journal, requests. In fact if asked to give the single piece of advice on submitting research papers to learned journals, I would say "Read the Instructions to Authors.". This is more than just a smart riposte; surprising as it may seem, the instructions are there to help authors submit in a form that is most easily handled and published by the journal and the closer the author conforms to the instructions the more rapidly a text can be processed. It is just as important to resist the temptation to include frills that the journal has not asked for. Even the best paper will need some editing and marking up for the printer; word-processors can do wonderful things, but if double-spaced typescript is what is requested then single spaced tiny type is definitely not wanted. Italics and bold mixed type-faces may look very nice, but will only cause confusion when marked up. If the text is kept simply in one type face, then the marked up version will be cleaner and simpler for the printer, causing fewer errors to be detected and corrected at the later stages.

The author should consider carefully what needs to go in his paper. Introductions, in particular, are often over-long. One editor of an international journal claims that the first paragraph of all introductions is routinely crossed out. For a specialist journal, it is not necessary to tell the reader that which the reader of that journal should already know. Further, if the author wishes to refer to previous experiments it is not necessary to give every example, in every species, of similar work.

Whereas in teaching, repetition is necessary to reinforce understanding, this does not apply in scientific papers and many papers can be considerably shortened by avoiding this sort of repetition. The structure of most research papers is now well-established and, while this should by no means be

sacrosanct, it works well and it should be quite clear what are methods and what are results. Apart from saving space, the lucidity of the product is much improved if the various components are correctly placed in the paper.

Computer graphics, like word-processors, can cause authors to lose control of their critical faculties. This may be manifested in large numbers of graphs (all self-scaling to make comparisons difficult!), when a single representative one will do, or in the liberal use of histograms when the data are more accurately and economically conveyed in Tables. Particularly prevalent just now is the submission of elaborate histograms in three dimensions resembling a helicopter view of Manhattan, and containing a handful of data points. These extravagances serve only to lengthen the paper and place extra demands on its preparation or on an editorial staff making the necessary cuts.

Consideration by authors of the above will help to streamline the procedure for a particular paper, and reduce the time taken to make it ready for publication. It will not, of course, help in the problems of delay in publication due to demand on space in the Journal. Many journals offer rapid publication of important research papers but this can only be done if there is a balance between accepted papers and Journal space or by giving priority to selected papers. Either way, the Journal would need to make decisions on rejection not wholly connected with their overall acceptability. I believe it is necessary for this Journal to put our cards on the table and say to some authors: yes, your paper has been reviewed, it seems well-executed and competent, and the conclusions are valid, but we cannot give it high priority and it would be better if you sought publication elsewhere. On the other side of the coin, we would seek to identify those papers that are deserving of priority and we propose that authors be allowed to request that option. Of course all authors will assume their work is red-hot and needs the fast-track treatment, but any that do so will need to be in a form requiring minimal alteration and will be reviewed by the Editorial Board who will not give a report but will give a yes or no answer. "Yes" means we will go ahead with sending the text to the printer, and put in the next available issue, ahead of the queue; "No" means priority has been refused but the paper may be reviewed through the normal system.

There are no restrictions on fast-track papers; if they are good enough then they will receive the special treatment. Nor will they be so designated in the Journal as special, but hopefully the various steps we are taking will combine to provide rapid and streamlined evaluation and publication of all worthwhile papers submitted to the *Journal of Pharmacy and Pharmacology*.

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