

Editorial

An Expanding Journal and the Quality of Research

This issue of the Journal of Pharmacy and Pharmacology marks a considerable increase in the size of the Journal, from 80 pages per month to 112 pages per month. This increase in size has been made necessary because of the large number of acceptable papers that are submitted to the Journal and to be able to publish these papers within a reasonable time after submission. Many authors wonder at the long time that elapses in the publication process and indeed, as a concerned editor, and as a scientist, I am acutely conscious of the desirability of bringing important research to the stage of publication as rapidly as possible. Some of the time involved in the publication process is the responsibility of the authors themselves who may take several months over revisions, or who may submit work with unsuitable Figures or Tables, requiring extra work in the editorial office before an acceptable piece of research work is ready for publication; nevertheless, there is still a problem with the sheer amount of publishable research leading to a queue for available space in the journal and the new size of the Journal is dedicated to bringing down the time to publication. We fully appreciate that the new size and shorter publication times may well attract even more papers to the Journal of Pharmacy and Pharmacology, and that to maintain the shorter time to publication, the Journal will need to make careful judgements on the papers submitted.

The judgements the Editor needs to make to ensure valuable research studies appear in the Journal depend to a large extent on the referees chosen to review submitted papers, and in the longer term having a concerned and active Editorial Board. The Journal calls on a very wide circle of referees — as is necessary for a journal covering the entire spectrum of the pharmaceutical sciences — and has also had a small but supportive Editorial Board proffering long-term advice. In 1996, the Journal will be extending its Editorial Board by additional members from North America and from Japan, as befits a reputable journal with such an international appeal. We also anticipate appointing Associate Editors for these two regions, who will be able to arrange for review of papers and acceptance, on behalf of the Editor, of papers originating in their areas.

Sharp-eyed readers may have noticed this issue is designated 1A. This is because, as well as this new 112-page issue, we are also publishing in January the proceedings of the 2nd Bath International Symposium on Medicinal Chemistry, which is therefore designated as issue 1B. The issue is included free to all regular subscribers to the Journal.

One of the problems that has exercised this, and other, Editorial Boards over the last few years has been the vexed question of citation analysis and impact factors. In the United Kingdom and in at least some parts of Europe, there has been a movement that suggests that the quality of a person's scientific work can be judged by the impact factor of the journal where his work is published (judging a man by the company he keeps, is the phrase that springs to mind). I hesitate to call this a school of thought, as I have yet to meet someone who actually believes in this thesis; unfortunately,

however, because that is how judgements are being made, the same people aim to publish in journals with high impact factors (the impact factor itself being several years out of date). The gambler who still plays the roulette wheel, even though he knows it is crooked, because it's the only game in town, would find fellow souls in the current academic climate.

Of course a journal should aspire to a high impact factor — what use is the journal if nobody reads it and nobody refers to work within its pages. The Editor, with the help of his referees and the support of the Editorial Board should endeavour to provide a suitable vehicle for high quality — even controversial — papers; but there should be no temptation to engineer high impact factors by artificial means. For those who wish to do so, I offer, for free, the following hints.

- There should be lots of reviews. Reviews are cited by other authors because it saves them the bother of looking at the literature; citing review articles also has the effect of depriving primary research articles of citations, hence depressing the impact factor of the 'competition'. The Journal of Pharmacy and Pharmacology does publish the occasional review, but usually by an involved worker in the field, who can bring critical analysis to the present state of the art of a subject. It is not, however, a review journal.

- The journal should encourage 'salami research'. This works as follows: the journal publishes a series of say, ten papers (it helps if they can all have a different first author), each succeeding paper referring to all the previous papers in the series; at the end of the sequence the ten published papers will have acquired a total of 50 citations, which approximates to an impact factor of 5!

- A vigilant editor can really help his own relative impact factor. This is done by examining the bibliography of submitted papers. He could reject all those that had no references to his own journal (some might say this is sensible anyway, on the grounds of unsuitable content). He could generously assist the authors by adding or substituting appropriate references from his own journal. And of course, in the course of editing those overlong bibliographies he could be fittingly selective about which references are retained. Some of these stratagems will have the effect of ensuring the same authors will return again and again to the same journal.

The point about these three approaches to increasing the impact factor of a journal is that they are all contrary to the legitimate aims of a good primary research journal. We do not intend to be a review journal; we actively discourage salami research; and authors should be encouraged to use the relevant literature, not just in publications, but for the better quality of their own research. This is why the Journal will wish to publish research which is fresh, substantial, and relevant. This is why the Journal is grateful to have an Editorial Board and a circle of referees that places these qualities to the fore in their role in dissemination and discussion of advances in the pharmaceutical sciences.

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