

## **The Journal of Pharmacy and Pharmacology – Progress and Processes**

When we assumed editorial responsibility for the *Journal of Pharmacy and Pharmacology* in January 2000, there were inevitably a series of discussions between ourselves, the publishers and editorial board in terms of how to take the Journal forward to meet the challenges of the new millennium. One such discussion that we remember with some affection was a simple but ultimately influential exercise whereby we made two lists. One consisted of practices that we, as authors ourselves, looked for and respected in a journal, while the other consisted of practices that had a negative effect on our submission choice. We then resolved to adopt the positive practices and avoid the negative if at all possible, thereby hopefully rendering the *Journal of Pharmacy and Pharmacology* an author-orientated publication that we would ourselves wish to submit to. High on the list of positive issues were the quality of the papers in the journal, the sense of achievement in having a paper accepted, a rapid processing time, high quality, multiple referee reports and a sense that the journal was treating us, as authors, with courtesy and respect, even if the outcome of the refereeing process was not necessarily in our favour. The negatives were essentially the antithesis of the above and hence need not be listed, other than to stress that we, again as authors, placed great emphasis on the quality, fairness and consistency of the refereeing process and accompanying editorial decision, to the extent that we considered this to be the single most likely factor to dissuade us to support the journal in question in the future. We believed then, and emphatically still do now, that if we could create an environment whereby members of the scientific community would choose to submit quality papers to the *Journal of Pharmacy and Pharmacology* then all other associated issues such as readership response, impact factor, subscription numbers and reputation would fall into place. It has been this consideration that has driven the editorial policy of the Journal.

On this basis, we would like to thank first and foremost the authors that have chosen to submit their work to us over the last year. We feel that the quality of the submissions that we are now receiving and the associated quality of the published issues have been such that the Journal can hold its metaphorical head very high within the pharmaceutical community. Intimately associated with this have been the outstanding quality and cooperative attitude of our referees, who have consistently produced detailed and thoughtful commentaries on the submissions within short timeframes, to the extent that an initial editorial decision is now made within eight weeks of receipt in virtually all cases, with the vast majority being within six weeks and many within four. We would also like to thank the editorial board who have provided invaluable advice and input into the management of the Journal. However, these advances have come at a price. Unfortunately, we have had to increase the rejection rate to a level of approximately 65% from circa 45% three years ago. We emphatically do not wish the quality of the Journal to be judged on what we reject; it is the quality of the papers that are accepted that is truly important. That said, and in the light of the above discussions, we do feel that this is now the right time to increase the transparency of the refereeing process so that authors may fully understand the criteria we use and the processes involved. To this effect we are now including much more detailed information on the refereeing policy of the Journal on our website ([www.pharmpress.com/jpp](http://www.pharmpress.com/jpp)) and will also be forwarding this information to authors in the acknowledgement e-mails. In this way we feel that, even when decisions go against acceptance of a paper, the authors will be fully conversant with the reasoning behind the decision and feel that the process involved is as fair as can be reasonably expected.

On receipt of a new submission, the paper is acknowledged by the editorial assistant and the editors alerted. An initial screening is performed, sometimes involving a

member of the editorial board, in order to ensure that the paper is within the scope of the journal and is sufficiently likely to be accepted so as to merit the full refereeing process being instigated. This protects both the authors and referees by allowing an initial decision to be made extremely quickly, if needs be. Following this process, the referees are selected by using keywords, either supplied by the author or chosen by the editors. Referees are chosen from the editorial board, the existing database or, in the vast majority of cases, by the editors performing a literature search in order to identify individuals who are working within that specific field. If the authors submit suggested referees, as they are requested to do, we will usually use one of those suggested individuals (particularly if they work in a different country to that of the authors). When the referees are selected copies of the paper are sent directly to them, with the request to contact the editorial assistant to confirm whether they can review the paper or otherwise. We do not contact the referees first electronically as this adds considerable time to the process. We ask referees who confirm their willingness to provide a response to do so within three weeks of receiving the manuscript. The time from receipt of a paper to it being sent out to referees is usually within four working days. On receipt of the reports, which include a confidential report to the editors, the decision is made to accept the paper with minor alterations, to consider the paper again if major improvements are made (in which case we will send the revised paper back to the referees) or to reject the paper. Please note that it is essential for acceptance that the referees show some enthusiasm for publication, as the presence or absence of serious scientific flaws is not by any means the sole criteria used. To this

effect, work that is unlikely to have a useful impact on the field in question is not accepted. In addition, we supply an editorial commentary on the quality of the statistics where appropriate. The authors are contacted with the initial decision within eight weeks of paper receipt; if we anticipate delays we e-mail the authors to warn them of this and to keep them informed of progress. This process is, we hope, as fair as can be reasonably expected and does in general lead to very detailed referees reports being provided in a short timescale. It should also be noted that authors can influence the refereeing process by suggesting suitable individuals and also by providing keywords for the literature search.

It was mentioned earlier that one of our positive criteria was the courteous treatment of the individuals involved in the process. We work on the basis that authors will almost invariably be submitting work in good faith and hence should be treated with due respect, even if the decision goes against them. We do feel that this process is greatly assisted by our editorial assistant, Ms Grainne McCarron, with whom many individuals reading this editorial will have been in communication. We would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the huge contribution that she makes to the publishing team. We would also like to fully and enthusiastically acknowledge the publishers of the Journal, the Pharmaceutical Press, who have not only fully supported our efforts to introduce new initiatives but also provide an outstanding service to authors in terms of rapid and highly professional processing from acceptance to print. On this note, we would like to end by wishing our authors, referees and readers all the best for 2003. Your support is greatly appreciated.