

The times they are still a'changing: keeping up with the times.

A P Varki

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Editorial

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*The woods are lovely, dark and deep. But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep.*

Robert Frost

Following a 70-year-old tradition, the *JCI* will change editorial command again in 1997. The search for a new editor is underway, and applications from many excellent candidates are under review. Most observers agree that the tenure of the current editorial group has been associated with improvements in the image and functioning of *The journal*. In times past, it would have been reasonable for the incumbents to rest on their laurels and coast to the finish without further ado. However, these are not ordinary times. As Toffler predicted (1), the rate of change has continued to accelerate, and a year is now too long a time to stay still. What follows is an interim report and an agenda for 1996 that is influenced by the need to keep *The journal* at the cutting edge.

Improvements in the review process. Introduction of the uniform manuscript submission form and of manuscript revision checklists have streamlined submissions and handling and reduced procedural delays. The review process has been overhauled and improved. Computerization of manuscript tracking and liberal use of overnight mail services and electronic communication have reduced the median time from submission to first decision to a little over 30 days. Some further improvements can be expected with electronic handling of manuscripts and reviews. Evaluation of the novel screening review system introduced in 1992 indicates that it is efficient and does not unduly compromise fairness and objectivity (2). While no peer review system is perfect, this screening approach appears, in balance, to be best for all concerned (authors, reviewers, and editors). If imitation is indeed the sincerest form of flattery, the Editors are pleased to note many obvious examples wherein other journals have copied the forms, procedures, and review policies recently developed by the *JCI*.

Increasing volume of manuscripts received. Despite the appearance of many new journals that are potential competitors, submissions continue to rise, having increased by almost 50% in the last five years and by almost 12% in 1995. As a nonprofit publication with limited space, the *JCI* now has an acceptance rate of ~20%, with projected rates for the future being lower. While this makes Editorial decisions ever more difficult, it ensures that *The Journal* need publish nothing but the best selections from among its submissions.

Broadening the recognition and readership of the *JCI*. The current explosion of knowledge in human and mammalian biology has been led by scientists with both medical and nonmedical backgrounds. Judging by recent submissions, we have succeeded in our goal of attracting the best work from investigators of all backgrounds interested in human biomedical research. In the future, electronic publication should ensure that the readership base of *The Journal* is further broadened.

Twice-monthly publication and time to publication. Beginning with this issue, the *JCI* will go to twice-monthly publication, enhancing the portability of the printed copy as well as the time from acceptance to publication. With the complete electronic conversion of manuscript submissions, copy-editing, and type-setting, a reasonable goal for the near future is to reduce this all-important bench-mark to an average of less than 8 weeks.

Electronic publishing. In an era when many undergraduate students have their own Home Page on the World Wide Web (3),

no self-respecting journal can be without one. The *JCI* Home Page can now be found at <http://www-comm.ucsd.edu/jci.htm>. Our publisher, The Rockefeller University Press, is currently completing preparations for an electronic (full-text and figures) version of *The Journal*, which will be available via a link from the *JCI* Home Page. The vexing issue of the day is how to appropriately charge users for this electronic access. The nonprofit nature of the *JCI* allows consideration of a truly novel solution—not to charge anyone at all! It remains to be seen whether this will be fiscally feasible.

Perspectives miniseries. The plethora of new periodicals that specialize in review articles makes it less necessary for the *JCI* to continue the tradition of presenting lengthy Perspectives which cover entire fields of research. Instead, such presentations will give way to Perspectives miniseries providing a series of shorter opinion pieces from experts in a given field. The first such series debuts in this issue and is entitled "Molecular Medicine in Genetically Engineered Animals" (see details in the accompanying Editorial by the Series Editor, Kenneth Chien).

Tasteful publicity. Some would argue that this term is an oxymoron. The Editors agree that broad publicity in the lay press is not desirable for most work published in *The Journal*, and indeed, has the potential to backfire. However, limited publicity aimed primarily at the scientific press is felt to be worthwhile. The *JCI* now feeds information about the topics covered in selected articles (particularly those featured in the Editorials at the front of each issue) to selected writers in the scientific press.

An electronic embargo date? The advent of electronic publication has raised new issues regarding both peer review and the significance of the classic embargo date tagged to the mailing date of a journal issue. An alternative being considered is to attain the speediest possible electronic publication of each paper as it is ready and to make the embargo date that of the electronic issue, rather than that of the release of the paper edition.

Competition and the danger to peer review. The attack on traditional peer review from many quarters is a new phenomenon that deserves attention. The *JCI* Editors agree with others (4) that biomedical research is still best served by a balanced and fair system for peer review prior to publication. However, many would argue that peer review as currently practiced by some prestigious journals is no longer fair or balanced. In the upcoming year the *JCI* plans to encourage dialogue on this issue, particularly among the Editors of prestigious biomedical journals.

In this truly remarkable era we live in, we must constantly change simply to avoid falling behind. As the Red Queen said to Alice (5) when the latter asked why they had to run so fast: . . . *it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that!*

Ajit P. Varki
Editor
for The Editorial Board

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