

Editorial: *Biomedicine '96. Academic Medicine Meets SCIENCE*

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Editorial

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This spring will mark the inauguration of a new kind of biomedical research meeting entitled "Biomedicine '96: Medical Research from Bench to the Bedside" (see the advertisement in this issue). As announced recently (1), the traditional spring Clinical Research Meeting will be transformed by a newly established co-operation with the journal *SCIENCE*, thus broadening the scope and impact of the event. This association is congruent with the goals of the *JCI*, which seeks to publish excellent work at the interface between science and academic medicine, written by authors of diverse scientific backgrounds and geographical origins (2). Indeed, some of the impetus for this transformation has come from the *JCI* editors.

Some historical background is in order. The *JCI* owes its existence to the American Society for Clinical Investigation (ASCI), an honorary society of physician-scientists founded in 1909, that is dedicated to advancing science relevant to human biology, physiology, and disease. The ASCI itself owes its beginnings to the "Atlantic City Meetings," an annual gathering of physician-scientists who met to discuss the latest advances in academic medicine. This meeting was originally sponsored by the Association of American Physicians (AAP), an elite honorary society that has represented the leadership of American academic medicine for more than a century. The ASCI was started by a group of so called "Young Turks" who felt that the AAP was too much dominated by the elder statesmen of the day. To ensure representation of the younger physician-scientists, the ASCI constitution declared that anyone over the age of 45 would automatically become an emeritus member (that age was later moved to 48). Despite the reactionary circumstances of its establishment, the ASCI chose to have its annual meeting in continued association with AAP (after all, some ASCI leaders were destined to one day lead the AAP!). However, the ASCI itself proved to be an equally elitist organization, accepting no more than 80 members a year from many nominees. The inevitable outcome was the formation of the American Federation for Clinical Research in 1940, an egalitarian organization that embraced all who had an interest in biomedical research and its applications to medicine. Happily, the AFRC also chose to have its annual meeting with the AAP and ASCI. This joint AAP/ASCI/AFRC meeting became the annual "must do" event for anyone who was anyone in academic medicine. Eventually, the meeting moved from Atlantic City, rotating to various major metropolitan centers. For many years, it remained the major gathering where the latest in biomedical research was presented and discussed. My own excitement at being invited to present postdoctoral work at the ASCI plenary session is vividly stamped in my memory.

As time went by several factors conspired to lessen the vigor and significance of these meetings (3, 4). For example,

the rapidly growing medical subspecialty societies enticed away many participants who were more clinically inclined. Simultaneously, the basic molecular revolution that began in the 1970s swept into prominence, as a means to understand, diagnose, and treat illnesses. This revolution was led to a significant extent, not by the traditional academic physician-scientists, but by basic researchers with little background in medicine. While this was a major gain for medical research, it was a loss for the annual meeting. Basic researchers with a new-found interest in biomedicine knew little about this meeting and its history. On the other hand, medically trained scientists preferred to interact with these basic researchers at other venues, such as the constituent societies of the FASEB. Added to this was the proliferation of small specialized scientific meetings modeled after the Gordon Research Conferences. Finally, the technological revolution in communication and information resources made it less necessary to be physically present at many meetings. Thus, the 1980s and early 90s saw a progressive decline in attendance and loss of interest in the Clinical Research Meeting (as it had come to be called). Some had even begun to question the very survival of the tradition (3).

In response to these concerns, the Tri-Society (AAP/ASCI/AFRC) leadership made a major effort in 1994 to revamp the meetings and re-establish their importance (4), changing the entire format and encouraging the participation of many well-known experts of medical and non-medical background. Partly at the urging of the Editorial Board of the *JCI*, the ASCI also expanded its membership, to include non-physician scientists interested in medical issues. While all of this increased enthusiasm for the meeting, and reversed the downward trend in attendance, it still did not have the major impact that had been hoped for. Something was still missing.

After the 1995 mid-winter ASCI council meeting, a group of councilors were informally discussing the state of the annual meeting, and wondering what might be done to improve it further. As we parted company to go home, Rick Klausner (then President) mentioned the success of meetings sponsored by the journal *Nature*, and wondered if the Societies should consider such an association. Upon returning home to La Jolla, I kept a prior appointment for scientific discussions with Floyd Bloom. By coincidence, Dr. Bloom had just been selected as the next editor of *SCIENCE*. Since he himself had started his career in academic medicine, and had fond memories of the Atlantic City meetings, it was easy to introduce the idea of an association with *SCIENCE*. Following this, a preliminary meeting of the ASCI leadership with the *SCIENCE* Editor occurred in San Diego, and it was felt that a joint venture would be beneficial for all concerned. This in turn catalyzed a round of negotiations between the Presidents of the Tri-Societies (Veronica Catanese, Judith Swain, and Arthur Rubenstein) and the management of *SCIENCE*. This process culminated in the formal association that has generated Biomedicine '96 (5). An added bonus will be the participation of the newly formed Molecular Medicine Society (originators of the journal *Molecular Medicine*), an international organization dedicated to

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many of the same principles espoused by the Tri-societies, but inclusive of all types of scientists from all over the world (6). The *JCI* Editors strongly encouraged and supported this association.

Some may wonder why the *JCI* Editors have chosen to encourage and facilitate the participation of other journals and societies that could be potentially “competitive” with itself. The answer is that biomedical research is a rapidly expanding enterprise, which has as much to gain from co-operation as from friendly competition. Witness to this is the fact that despite the advent of many new “competing” journals in the last two years, the manuscript submission rate to the *JCI* has continued to increase at a rate of more than 10% per year.

This is truly an exciting time to be involved in biomedical research, and Biomedicine '96 promises to be a showpiece for this revolution. For those who stopped attending the “Clinical Meetings” some years ago, it is time to take a new look. For those of more basic research persuasion whose work has led to an increasing interest in medicine, this could be an opportu-

nity to open new vistas and fruitful interactions. See you in the Nation's capital when the cherry blossoms are blooming!

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for The Editorial Board

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