As of the writing of this Editorial, the current JCI Editorial Board has evaluated approximately 7,000 manuscripts over the past 22 months for their suitability for publication in our journal. While many of you have received a negative decision on your manuscript, I suspect few are aware of the changes we have made to our review process to limit reviewers’ requests for what is in our view unnecessary and excessive experimentation.

Over the past few years, much has been written about the peer review process and reviewers’ insistence on, along with journal editors’ acquiescence to, numerous additional experiments as a condition of acceptance (1, 2). Whether this practice, which has evolved over time, has led to a better “product” is debatable. Indeed, if one uses reproducibility of published work as a metric of high-quality science, one can argue that we are failing miserably (3–5). So we must ask ourselves, what does it achieve to have a paper in the review process for 9–12 months or longer, undergoing multiple revisions and countless additional experiments that are then buried as on-line supplemental data? To me — not much!

I believe we have arrived at this point because of a convergence of a number of factors: First, there is a wealth of reagents and techniques available, essentially allowing a laboratory to perform almost any experiment imaginable, and, likewise, a reviewer who can request any imaginable experiment. Second, scientific malfeasance is all too common, and journal editors and the scientific community want and need the scientific record to be correct. Third, and I believe most important, many high-profile journals employ professional editors who are not actively engaged in scientific discovery to adjudicate decisions on manuscripts. Fortunately, the Editorial Board of the JCI functions differently. All the Associate Editors have active research programs, run their own research laboratories, submit their research discoveries to journals, and have experienced the desperation of a rejection letter and the excitement of a new direction. Indeed, if after your thoughtful assessment of the science you are about to recommend the authors perform many additional experiments, then just reject the paper. Last, I believe timeliness of review is paramount for a successful review process. Therefore, we will be shortening the initial review period from 14 to 10 calendar days.

We at the JCI believe that we can make a difference and reverse this pernicious trend in science while still maintaining the highest standards of excellence at the journal and in the scientific literature. Having authors waste precious time and resources on experiments of limited value not only impedes the whole scientific endeavor, but also deflates the scientific spirit. We request that you work with us to provide timely critiques that move the review process in a new direction.

I, along with the rest of the Board, look forward to continuing to serve the JCI community and being on the leading edge of publishing new discoveries that advance our knowledge and change the practice of medicine. As always, I welcome your feedback (editors@the-jci.org).

Howard A. Rockman,
Editor in Chief