

A Message from the Editor

THE first volume of the *European Journal of Cancer* appeared in 1965. One hundred articles were submitted to the Editorial Office and 50 were accepted and published. In 1988, there were 597 articles submitted and 336 published making a total of approximately 2000 pages. As shown in the editorial published at the beginning of this year (*Eur J Cancer Clin Oncol* 1989, **25**, 1-2) there has been a steady increase in the number of articles published over the years and this has not apparently been affected by the phenomenal multiplication of cancer journals in the last 15 years.

The average production time of an article is 4.9 months between acceptance and publication. This is a peer reviewed journal and each manuscript is sent to at least two referees. The time for refereeing is one month but may extend to 6 weeks or even 2 months. The Editorial Office maintains contact with each referee. The authors are sometimes responsible for delay in publication. Manuscripts may be badly written, instructions to authors are not always followed, bibliographic references may be faulty. Some manuscripts may have to be completely rewritten after review by the referees.

And here is the place to express heartfelt thanks to the referees who perform an amazingly complete and complex job of reading manuscripts, analyzing them, pointing out the errors, sometimes correcting the syntax and vocabulary. Most of them are so conscientious that they do the work which actually belongs to the chief of a research team, indicating wrong directions and advising the authors in a constructive way. I think that one of the highest manifestations of the scientific spirit, of the fellowship and brotherhood of scientists in all parts of the world is apparent in the function of the referees. They remain anonymous, they are not paid, they perform one of the most disinterested philanthropic actions and are an encouragement for those of us who keep their faith in human nature. We regularly publish their names. We wish we could do more to

acknowledge the importance of their service to medical science. Perhaps they live happily in the consciousness of their unselfish devotion to the progress of science.

Without adequate peer review, a scientific journal cannot really exist. There are many examples of medical journals publishing articles that are not refereed, or are refereed with negligence. These journals are generally not worth reading. I call 'to referee with negligence' the practice of asking someone around, not necessarily expert in the field, to give a hasty opinion on a submitted paper. Negligent refereeing, practiced for the sake of shortening the production time of articles, is a misappreciation of the double function of a scientific journal, which is to provide authentic information to readers, and to teach correct scientific style to authors.

The present Editor perceives the fast approaching term of his mandate on 31 December 1989 and wishes to express his gratitude to authors, referees, advisers and friends who have helped him over these 25 years. Choosing a new editor represents an important responsibility for the maintenance of high standards, perhaps with different methods. Finally the choice belongs to the publisher, the owner of the Journal with the help of consultants, fellow editors and scientists.

In finishing I should like to point out the place and role of the United States in scientific and medical research. The creation of EORTC with its Data Center, Liaison Office, Exchange Program, *European Journal of Cancer & Clinical Oncology*, was certainly an expression of the wishes of a group of European scientists, but the realization of these objectives was at the beginning most entirely the work of the United States. They did it not only by the granting of funds at a time when literally none was conceded by European institutions, but also by continuous moral as well as financial support.

This is also the time to say, returning to the

Journal, that we have found good referees in many countries, but nowhere approaching in number and quality the U.S. referees. We Europeans should always remember the debt we owe the U.S., aptly called by recent French writers, the Athens of the 20th century. We should also remember to live up to the expectation the U.S. entertains of the progress of Europe, which in their eyes justifies their support. The National Institutes of Health of the U.S. have officially affirmed their commitment to international scientific collaboration. Our American friends should be consulted on the future of the Journal.

In concluding, I should pay tribute to Mrs. A.M. Stift, the Editorial Secretary of the Journal in the Brussels Office. Competent, good humored, even tempered, she has been the model Editorial Secretary for any scientific journal. Her association and

that of Ms. J. Leroy who was the first Secretary until her retirement several years ago were irreplaceable factors of what I may call our success. I wish my successor when I go, to be able to enlist associates of similar competence and devotion to work.

The Editor acknowledges how much he has enjoyed his work, his association with authors and referees, with good scientists and outstanding clinicians. An editor learns a great deal not only of medical science, but also of human nature, and of the organization and management of science and medicine. All this makes him a more mature man and perhaps a better human being, an adviser and a teacher. I have many reasons to be thankful.

H.J. TAGNON

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