

Editorial

There is no doubt but that the *Zeitschrift für Rechtsmedizin* and its predecessors are among the journals with the longest and richest tradition within the discipline of legal medicine. Officially, it was first published in 1922, but under different titles it can be traced back to 1823. Its development was described in some detail by the last Chief Editor, Professor Gerchow, in his Editorial in Volume 100 (Z Rechtsmed 1988, 100:1–3). The fact that the name and the scope of our journal have changed several times in the past reflects another important development, viz. the continuous incorporation of new scientific advances. This was essential because, as science progressed specialization increased, to the point where previously integrated aspects became separate disciplines. This allowed a more direct focus on the central aim of legal medicine, that is to say on more effective application of medical and scientific procedures to the elucidation of crimes. This ability to respond to new demands in a constantly changing situation bears witness to the vitality of the discipline and also of all the people who have been responsible for the production of the Journal.

In both practical and theoretical terms, legal medicine is an old discipline, and it is a long time since it could be regarded as a single entity. The name, the discipline and the Journal continue to stand for a concentration of various medical and associated specialties aimed at serving the law in the examination of crime by working toward the maintenance and advancement of science. From this definition it is obvious that further development will be especially effective (1) when theory and practice are closely linked and (2) when the different tools used for the elucidation of crimes are applied in a synergistic manner and not in parallel or independently of each other.

The present step we are taking into our new future with publication exclusively in English means that the ar-

ticles in the International Journal will be accessible to the entire scientific community. As in the past, the Editorial Board and the referees will be applying rigorous selection standards to ensure that the high quality of the journal is maintained. In addition, we hope the extended platform now provided by the Journal will encourage new authors to contribute articles that will provide new stimulus and add to the sum of scientific knowledge.

Our decision to use English only in the Journal in the future was reached after intensive dialogue between the Editors, the German Society of Legal Medicine, and Springer-Verlag; in the end agreement was unanimous. Thus, it was possible to secure the assistance of internationally acclaimed scientists as new editors and referees. Special thanks are due to Springer-Verlag for a great deal of help and understanding during this period of change.

Special thanks are also due to Prof. Dr. J. Gerchow, who took over the Journal at a difficult time but constantly made substantial changes, as reported in Volume 100 of the Journal. He headed the Editorial Board for more than 20 years, during which time he made the Journal into an international forum, due in part to the ever-increasing proportion of contributions published in English. As a result of Professor Gerchow's strategy, the international standing of the Journal improved considerably, and in recent years it has attained a position of eminence. As we now cross over to publication entirely in English, this step simultaneously marks the end of a period of change and presents us with a new challenge.

On behalf of the Editorial Board, I would like to ask the scientific community to support us in our new position with the submission of papers, with critical discussion and with innovative ideas.

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