

## THE EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

During the latter part of 1968, Dr. E. H. Ahrens, Jr., then Editor of the *Journal of Lipid Research*, appointed five well-known investigators in the lipid field to serve as Associate Editors. Since January 1969, the Editor, Executive Editor, and five Associate Editors have met together bi-weekly to carry out their duties as an *Editorial Committee*. This was the first of the three major changes mentioned in the editorial published in the July issue of the Journal. A number of questions have been asked during the past 18 months concerning the operation of this Committee. How does it work? What advantages does it offer contributors? Is it really necessary?

A brief review of our editorial procedure will help to put the operation of the *Editorial Committee* in perspective. When papers are received in the Editorial office, the Executive Editor and the Editor select a member of the Editorial Board to subedit the manuscript. Copies of the manuscript are sent to the subeditor, who then selects the reviewers and sends the manuscripts to them. Both manuscripts and reviewers' comments are then returned to the subeditor. The subeditor, after examining the comments and covering letters, prepares a statement indicating his decision and the major reasons for it. The complete "package" is then sent to the appropriate Associate Editor, who presents the results to the *Editorial Committee* and prepares the first draft of a letter to be sent to the authors. The Editor writes the final letter.

Each Associate Editor has the role of editor for a particular manuscript, but his judgment is subject to review and modification by other members of the *Editorial Committee*. This scheme makes it possible to secure a high level of informed opinion without subjecting any single authority to an excessive work load. The field of lipids has become very diversified and sophisticated in recent years, and it would be difficult to find someone who could single-handedly execute the functions of Editor with a sense of satisfaction in the quality of his performance. By distributing the effort among a group of Editors, the task of each member is reduced to reason-

able proportions. It must be kept in mind that the Editor and Associate Editors have major commitments to other activities from which they derive their salaries. For the services they perform for the scientific community as Editors of the *Journal of Lipid Research*, they receive no financial compensation.

A question has been raised concerning the need for review of the decisions of the subeditors. Can the opinion of the subeditor not be forwarded directly to the authors? It has been our experience that the review system does not perform well without some active discussion of each manuscript. With few exceptions, the subeditors' decisions are sustained. However, the problem that the Journal faces is one of establishing and maintaining a high standard of professional excellence, and, at the same time, of formulating opinions that are as uniform and constructive as possible. A system of checks and balances is needed. The discussions of the *Editorial Committee* at its biweekly meetings provide such a system, one that encompasses the Associate Editors themselves as well as subeditors and reviewers. Although a member of the *Editorial Committee* serves as editor for a particular manuscript, his views must receive the approval of the committee as a whole. The major roles of the Editor are to act as arbiter and to strive for the uniformity in outlook that would be difficult to attain if members of the *Editorial Committee* or subeditors were autonomous.

In spite of all of our combined efforts, we are still susceptible to errors in judgment, errors that may be disturbing to readers as well as to authors. I am convinced, however, that the *Editorial Committee* is the best mechanism we have for reducing these errors to the smallest number possible and for providing the authors the greatest protection against harsh decisions.

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