The woods are lovely, dark and deep. But I have promises to keep, And miles to go before I sleep.

Robert Frost

Following a 70-year-old tradition, the JCI will change editorial command again in 1997. The search for a new editor is underway, and applications from many excellent candidates are under review. Most observers agree that the tenure of the current editorial group has been associated with improvements in the image and functioning of The Journal. In times past, it would have been reasonable for the incumbents to rest on their laurels and coast to the finish without further ado. However, these are not ordinary times. As Toffler predicted (1), the rate of change has continued to accelerate, and a year is now too long a time to stay still. What follows is an interim report and an agenda for 1996 that is influenced by the need to keep The Journal at the cutting edge.

Improvements in the review process. Introduction of the uniform manuscript submission form and of manuscript revision checklists have streamlined submissions and handling and reduced procedural delays. The review process has been overhauled and improved. Computerization of manuscript tracking and liberal use of overnight mail services and electronic communication have reduced the median time from submission to first decision to a little over 30 days. Some further improvements can be expected with electronic handling of manuscripts and reviews. Evaluation of the novel screening review system introduced in 1992 indicates that it is efficient and does not unduly compromise fairness and objectivity (2). While no peer review system is perfect, this screening approach appears, in balance, to be best for all concerned (authors, reviewers, and editors). If imitation is indeed the sincerest form of flattery, the Editors are pleased to note many obvious examples wherein other journals have copied the forms, procedures, and review policies recently developed by the JCI.

Increasing volume of manuscripts received. Despite the appearance of many new journals that are potential competitors, submissions continue to rise, having increased by almost 50% in the last five years and by almost 12% in 1995. As a nonprofit publication with limited space, the JCI now has an acceptance rate of ~20%, with projected rates for the future being lower. While this makes Editorial decisions ever more difficult, it ensures that it is efficient and does not unduly compromise fairness and objectivity (2). The plethora of new periodicals that masquerade as potential competitors is no longer fair or balanced. In the upcoming year the JCI Editors agree with others (4) that additional peer review from many quarters is a new phenomenon that deserves attention. The JCI Editors agree that broad publicity in the lay press is not desirable for most work published in The Journal, and indeed, has the potential to backfire. However, limited publicity aimed primarily at the scientific press is felt to be worthwhile. The JCI now feeds information about the topics covered in selected articles (particularly those featured in the Editorials at the front of each issue) to selected writers in the scientific press.

Tasteful publicity. Some would argue that this term is an oxymoron. The Editors agree that broad publicity in the lay press is not desirable for most work published in The Journal, and indeed, has the potential to backfire. However, limited publicity aimed primarily at the scientific press is felt to be worthwhile. The JCI now feeds information about the topics covered in selected articles (particularly those featured in the Editorials at the front of each issue) to selected writers in the scientific press.

An electronic embargo date? The advent of electronic publication has raised new issues regarding both peer review and the significance of the classic embargo data tagged to the mailing date of a journal issue. An alternative being considered is to attain the speediest possible electronic publication of each paper as it is ready and make the embargo date of that electronic issue, rather than that of the release of the paper edition.

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