

The Editors' Dilemma

Molecular Medicine continues to provide a forum for disseminating new insights into the genetic, molecular, and cellular bases of disease that have been gleaned from the study of mammalian systems or model organisms. While the mission of the journal remains the same, beginning with this issue of *Molecular Medicine*, a changing of the editorial guard takes effect, and with it arrives changes in journal policy, new layouts, new formats for the print and electronic versions of the journal, a new publisher, and new online systems (<http://www.molmed.org>). If change is good, so be it, as we are certainly on the right track. But to what end? Doesn't the literature already abound in journals trumpeting new advances in the biomedical sciences? Even if convincing arguments could be forwarded that real needs exist for further modifying the standards of existing journals, how do we, as editors, persuade readers and authors alike that this will not be "business as usual" and that we want to help initiate change for the betterment of science? All are good questions and not ones answered so easily. Nonetheless, we are convinced that the task of identifying and improving the quality of selected papers for widespread dissemination remains an important work in progress and that a nonprofit journal organized and run by peer scientists and editors can make a valuable contribution to this enterprise.

running afoul of referees or editors who conclude all too quickly that your work is simply "confirmatory"?

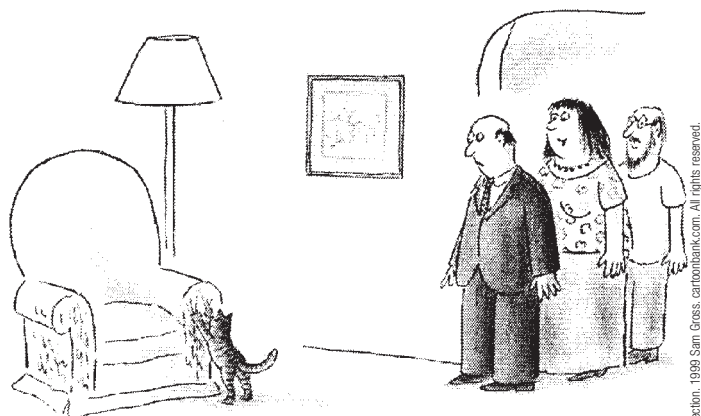
The second category is one in which you have completed a study in which the conclusions are new and the implications are obvious and of general interest. However, concerns arise among your lab group that the subject of study might no longer be considered "timely" or "hot". The greatly feared judgment, "better suited for a specialized journal in the field," raises the possibility that your work will be relegated to a journal with a more checkered history where its impact on the field will be muffled or lost amongst an avalanche of lesser contributions.

Finally, the third category of work is the scientist's delight—an almost "perfect" story. Interesting topic, carefully executed, it demonstrates in no uncertain terms that current dogma is flawed. New principles will be advanced by your laboratory and others once the work is published. Yet, the complete and final answer eludes you. Indeed, it is probably years away—even with multiple labs attacking the problem. If you want your work read widely, how to avoid the wrath of a reviewing body that insists that the work is "premature" and undeserving of publication until such time that the new solution has been tested and validated—in vitro and in vivo?

Obviously, these problems have been encountered by many of us for some time. In the course of the review process, we all have been, at one time or other, lambasted by the overzealous, received warmly by the naïve, or even helped by a careful reviewer and editor. Schemes for accentuating the best of the system while circumnavigating the pitfalls are not easily designed or implemented. However, what all of us really want is a venue where rigor and scholarship reign, where the ephemeral timeliness of a topic is a nonissue, and flawed conclusions—no matter how popular—are recognized for what they are. The problem is that even if these goals are identified universally as important, how can the spirit of this approach be infused in referee and editor alike?

A Solution Stirs

It is clear to us, having collectively served on innumerable boards, that the raison d'être of a journal can only be promulgated successfully by a group of editors comprised of peers who share a common vision and commitment. As editors, we cannot control the quality of submitted papers nor can we certify the efforts of every referee that we consult. However, we can and will take responsibility for the actions of the Editors. The Deputy Editors, all carefully selected and internationally recognized for their scientific efforts, understand fully that we are to act as the "gatekeepers" who will use the input supplied by referees to formulate a measured, but independent opinion. Clearly, we need and will solicit expert advice from authorities in the field. However, with the help of a world-class Board of Editorial Advisors, the final recommendations will fall ultimately to our hands, as will the responsibility of explaining the rationale that guided our decision. Of course, many journals subscribe to a similar approach where the Editorial Board serves as a buffer of sorts from the more capricious whims of either well-inten-



"We believe that in a former life she was an editor."

The Authors' Lament

Even the most creative and rigorous scientists find that major works are released from their laboratories intermittently, with steady and careful progress bridging the intervening highs. This type of progress usually generates solid and important contributions that fall into one of at least three classes. In the all too common first category, having set out to solve an interesting problem in the field, your carefully designed set of experiments and scholarly analysis of the data yields a definitive and elegant solution. However, concerns arise as you find that a competitor has reached an identical conclusion using a flawed experimental plan coupled with a naïve interpretation. Where to publish without



"Ob, dear, I'm afraid you've backed me into a corner."

tioned, but overly critical referees, ill-informed reviewers, or even ill-advised editors. However, our intent is to move the journal further away from the outwardly friendly, but only dimly veiled, adversarial nature of most author–editor interactions. If we do our jobs correctly, we intend for the editors to act as helpful arbiters to mediate between the authors' perceptions of perfection and those of the referees whose comments inevitably will range from the valuable to the destructive. It is our hope that an engaged editorial board will, in the end, take an active role in helping authors generate improved works that placate the critical while informing our general audience. By recalling the "authors' laments," the Editors at *Molecular Medicine* are committed to promoting and advancing scientific discourse.

In the months and years to come, we hope to further improve the services provided to authors by expanding the Editorial Board to include a cadre of reviewing editors who will help critique and/or shepherd manuscripts through the review process. We also have initiated a new series, "In Overview," which will provide a forum for recognized experts in the field to provide their perspective on emerging concepts. Rather than simply providing a convenient forum for citing the most recent papers published in a given field, authors will be encouraged to present their "take" on a problem of general interest. We hope that this series will present readers

with new ways of synthesizing a body of literature while helping the community rethink dogma and establish new paradigms.

Of course, ambitious as our plans might be, none of these moves could have been contemplated without the support of the North Shore-Long Island Jewish Research Institute, a nonprofit organization under the directorship of Dr Nicholas Chiorazzi. The Institute and its programs are dedicated to providing new insights into disease pathogenesis and molecular medicine (see p 63). Consistent with their research mission, the leaders of the institute, as well as the North Shore-Long Island Jewish Health System, have committed themselves to the further development and growth of *Molecular Medicine*. We, and hopefully the scientific community as well, are indebted to them for their support of this enterprise.

Finally, our ability to further develop *Molecular Medicine* is dependent entirely on the efforts of our predecessors. For the last four years, Sir David Weatherall served tirelessly as the Editor-in-Chief of *Molecular Medicine* and developed the foundation upon which we can now build. Until his retirement two years ago, Sir David held the Regius Professorship of Medicine in Oxford and the Directorship of the Institute of Molecular Medicine at Oxford. In 2000, the institute was renamed the Weatherall Institute of Molecular Medicine in honor of his many contributions to the field. We are indebted to Sir Weatherall for his efforts on the behalf of *Molecular Medicine* and hope to take every advantage of the inroads he has helped establish. Sir Weatherall continues to pursue actively his interests in international health, particularly in developing countries, and we wish him the very best in his new endeavors.

As we move forward in building *Molecular Medicine*, we hope that our peers will take note. *Molecular Medicine* is committed to the rapid review and dissemination of interesting advances in the biomedical sciences. It is our intent to provide a valuable and welcome service to the scientific community. We will not succeed without your help and invite your comments and suggestions to help us improve the journal's mission.

STEPHEN J WEISS, MD

For the Editors