

*M. Ramam*

We are glad to report that the Journal is doing well. We publish punctually, we attract good manuscripts, we receive the assistance of expert referees, our production values are good, the entire text is available free of charge, we levy no author fees, and we are read, accessed and cited by a large number of people. Our readers, authors and referees come from all over the world. The journal belongs to a medical society but there is complete editorial freedom. It has been an extraordinary privilege to serve as the editor of a journal of this stature.

Much of the Journal's standing stems from what our predecessors had accomplished and our task has been largely to keep the ship steady. This was a full-time job that required a sustained effort by a large group of people working continually and hard. Most of our effort went into maintaining standards and adhering to schedules. However, we also made some changes and introduced some new features.

Recognizing that knowledge can be acquired in various ways, not all based on data and evidence, we published several viewpoints, commentaries and editorials, many commissioned, some unsolicited, that allowed opinions to be expressed in a format that did not require strict documentation of all statements and assertions. These essays addressed important and topical subjects including vitiligo, leprosy, human immunodeficiency virus infection, pemphigus vulgaris, vitamin D, sunscreens, dermoscopy and

innovating in dermatology, among others. We reviewed, edited and published therapeutic guidelines developed by our association, the last of which appeared in the November–December 2016 issue. We worked to make articles easier to read by developing a pre-publication checklist for authors and a style sheet for copy editors, and calling on a group of dermatologists to serve as language editors. We also worked on improving images by enlarging images on the cover, in the Images in Clinical Practice section and accompanying articles. Collages and composite images were phased out and replaced by individual images of column-width so that details could be easily visualized. For many months, we ran a column called Snippets from Acad\_IADVL providing a glimpse into discussions in this academic e-group. Viva questions from the IJDVL was designed for residents and trainees and is a set of questions with accompanying answers loosely based on the contents of each issue of the Journal. We hope this exam-oriented article stimulated some trainees to look at other sections of the Journal. We now receive nearly half of our submissions from other countries and the IJDVL International Awards were instituted to recognize the excellence of contributions from these authors.

We introduced ahead-of-print publication. This consisted of publishing articles online as soon as editorial processing was complete, unlike in the past when articles would be published only after they were allocated to a print issue. The primary beneficiaries were authors who no longer had to wait for print publication to reach their audience and receive academic credit for their work. But there were other spin-offs. Without a publication deadline looming, we could do a better job of correcting proofs, editing images and seeking clarifications from authors. Gradually, we built up a pool of articles that had been published online and were ready to be included in a print issue,

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when it came time for one. This contributed to our ability to publish promptly and even slightly ahead of time. It has also enabled us to leave behind a fair number of publication-ready articles for the incoming editor, a luxury not available either to us or to our immediate predecessor.

We tried to help new authors and old understand what the Journal expected from them. To this end, we described in some detail how we processed manuscripts and provided guidance on avoiding common errors when writing, taking publication-quality images, writing the limitations section of an original article and converting a postgraduate thesis to a paper. We re-cast the templates for different article types on the Journal website to bring them in line with current author instructions and Journal practices. We re-wrote the text of many system-generated reminders and messages to sound more pleasant and civil. We tried our best to respond to author needs and queries in a helpful, supportive and respectful way. We solicited feedback from a wide range of readers, authors and referees, accepted their criticism, listened to their suggestions for improvement and delighted in their compliments. One such suggestion led to the large Letters section being divided into more manageable units based on broad themes.

A project that gave us great satisfaction was the expansion of our digital archives. Earlier, you could read the full text of articles that had appeared in the Journal from 1990 onward. Now, you can do so nearly all the way back to 1961. The only barrier to having all Journal articles online is the availability of hard copies. In response to a previous appeal, Dr. Vikram Sood sent us three volumes and these have now been digitized and uploaded. If you have any or all of the others that are missing (volumes 33, 34, 41 and 42 of 1967, 1968, 1974 and 1975, respectively), or know any one who does, please contact us and we will make arrangements to pick them up, digitize the articles and return the hard copies.

We should perhaps mention that the journal impact factor continued to improve during this period. Till last year, this metric reflected the work of our predecessor but to our great relief, the number we received this year also showed a slight increase. We are not sure what the impact factor measures but it seems to be important to people, and so we are glad it continues to be healthy. Our publishers Medknow-Wolters Kluwer continue to partner us in our endeavor to produce a

journal of quality with their good publishing practices and professionalism.

## TUGHLAQ

One of the perks of the job is that the editor gets to indulge some of their idiosyncrasies. We dislike acronyms and attempted to stamp them out. Sentences such as this did not appear in the Journal: HRZE for LV and SD is needed for as long as PTB, though not as long as BTB. While the presence of an irritant evokes an immediate reaction, its absence may not be perceived and we wonder if readers noticed this editorial change. In another quirk, we discouraged claims of “firstness” and permitted the rarity of a condition to be stated once in the entire article, if it was relevant. We were particularly unimpressed by claims that came heavily qualified by time, region, language or other modifier such as the first English language report in the present century from east of the Suez in a child born in an aeroplane flying over Jhumri Talaiya in the winter. For the cover, we chose images for their visual impact more than any other attribute. A front cover that folded out to reveal an advertisement did not appeal to us so we moved this feature to the back. We have a weakness for negative studies. We think it is as important to know which treatments do not work as knowing which ones do. However, since authors prefer to report successful therapies the number of negative studies we received and published is small. We would like to see more. We feel that the tropical diseases we see so much of are not adequately documented. Reports of these familiar diseases may appear to lack novelty but unless they are published the spectrum of disease is not accurately reflected in the literature and thereafter, in textbooks.

## LIMITATIONS

We fell short in some departments. We could have done better at raising money. The back cover did not carry an advertisement for nearly the entire duration of our editorship. We attempted to make a virtue of this by featuring notices of the mid-year and annual meetings of our Association, without a fee. Nevertheless, the inability to attract greater advertisement revenue was a failing that needs to be remedied.

We carried fewer narrative review articles than we used to, most noticeably in our first few issues. Subsequently, we published 1–2 review articles every time but could have done more. Narrative reviews are greatly

appreciated by many of our readers (we understand they also have a positive effect on the journal impact factor). We could have invited reviews and planned symposia to augment this section of the journal and not depended merely on organic, unsolicited submissions.

We take longer than we should to process manuscripts for publication. If you press us, we could come up with good reasons/excuses: we do a thorough job of triaging articles, we pick referees for their expertise in the field, we do not send manuscripts to multiple referees to hasten the process, we revise and re-revise articles to iron out bugs, and so on. However, we do need to work more quickly.

### **THE TEAM**

It is a good feeling to be looking back on the last 4 years, 1 year as editor-elect and 3 years as editor. Looking ahead was considerably more difficult. Soon after taking on the job, we realized we could not do this on our own and went about seeking help. We estimate that over the period of our editorship, we received help from about forty people on a regular basis and from several others in an intermittent manner. Having

a group of people working together not only lightens the load but also allows more time to be spent doing a better job. It allows for consultation and collaboration. The common mission brought together a group with great diversity in age, career stage, gender, type of practice and location. You did not need to know the editor, or work and train in their department, or live in the same city to be a team member. In fact, there are some long-standing members of the team we met only recently and one whom we have not yet met (!) because not everybody is able to attend the annual day-long team meetings we initiated to discuss issues related to the journal.

We thank the many people who participated in the work of the last 4 years. We know how important their contributions were and how little we could have done without them. We hope the experience they gained will be an asset to our Association as they continue to serve the Journal in various capacities, with some perhaps choosing in time to take on greater editorial responsibility at this journal, or others.

We wish Dr. Saumya Panda, the new editor all success in this challenging and rewarding assignment.