
From the Editor

Dear Readers:

I've been thinking a lot lately about the relative merits and drawbacks of two very different forms of scientific communication. One is the peer-reviewed scientific journal, which has been in existence for centuries. The second, which happens to be chronologically second also, is scientific discourse via the Internet. This form of communication has been in existence for less than a decade, an outgrowth of the technology that allows it to happen.

An obvious benefit of the Internet is the speed with which one can disseminate information. Clearly, this can be accomplished much faster than going through a review, revision, copyediting, and formatting process (whether this be for a traditional printed publication or an online publication). By the same token, information can be quickly entered on the Internet without following the more stringent requirements for submission to a peer-reviewed journal. The key is to identify which types of information may be handled in each of these ways.

Peer review is the gold standard for scientific communication, and with good reason. It is a system that has developed over the past hundreds of years to verify that research has been conducted in a methodical, reproducible fashion, and that it has been based on accurate assumptions taken from the body of knowledge on that particular subject. Peer review gives colleagues the time to read and reflect on the content of a paper. It gives them the opportunity to ask the authors questions and to make suggestions to clarify points before the paper is distributed. In the field of perfusion this is imperative, so that we may provide the safest care possible to our patients.

Discourse on the Internet is really just a conversation between perfusionists ("chat room" is an apt description). This is an excellent way to identify colleagues with experience in new products and procedures and to request information on issues such as staffing. It is an informal type of communication and not a substitute for careful research and experimentation. Opinions must be distinguished from documented and published results. My hope is that this form of communication will not supplant the research paper because of its ease of execution and its easy accessibility.

On a very positive note, your interest in the peer-reviewed paper shows no sign of diminishing. I'm happy to report that we had a healthy increase in the number of submissions to the Journal of Extra-Corporeal Technology this year. I thank all our authors and our hardworking Editorial Board for their contributions to the science of perfusion in 1998 and I look forward to an even more successful 1999.

Sincerely,

Phyllis Palmer Stark, CCP
Editor

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