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THE EDITOR'S CORNER

The Editorial Balancing Act

All editors and publishers live with the constant worry that something they have printed will turn out to be uninteresting or irrelevant, or both. What's more, they have to balance their need to put out each issue on schedule with their readers' expectation of a product that is accurate and correct.

Progress in science depends on innovation. Inevitably, however, an editorial tension develops between encouragement of useful innovation and preservation of the accuracy that is demanded of any serious publication. An orthodontic journal that focuses on originality to the neglect of quality, or vice versa, is doing a disservice to both readers and patients.

Testing the validity of an article is a task often entrusted to peer review. JCO, like most other professional journals, takes seriously the responsibility of thoroughly vetting its published articles. We solicit the help of some of the specialty's most knowledgeable and respected people, and in most cases, the final product is an article that benefits our readers and their patients.

For all its merits, however, the professional peer review system has slowed, severely limited, or even prevented the publication of many important scientific concepts. To mention only a few instances:

- The article by Krebs on the citric acid cycle was initially rejected by peer reviewers.¹
- Funding requests for the now-widespread technique of in vitro fertilization were turned down by the peer-review process.²
- The original article identifying *H. pylori* as the causative ineffective agent in stomach ulcers was refused publication and universally derided at first.³
- The role of vitamin C in preventing or ameliorating colon cancer, as hypothesized by Pauling and Cameron, has never been fairly tested by critics; the original research still languishes outside the traditional scientific literature.⁴

Over the past 30 to 40 years, the amount of government and private funding for dental research has been

substantial, and thousands of journal articles have been spawned by this investment. Most of the articles I have read personally have been carefully reviewed, well written, and precisely edited. However, it is the truly innovative articles that propel and prod our profession forward. For this reason, I purposely encourage the "idea entrepreneur", and I am more willing to err on behalf of originators than of conventional authors. Innovators tend to be less patient and precise than their less imaginative, but more controlled, colleagues. Nevertheless, when a clever idea offers a chance of improved diagnosis or therapy, with a negligible potential for doing harm to patients, I tend to look on it favorably.

If you are ever tempted to doubt the worthiness of an article in JCO, remember that the editors are trying to strike a balance between sci-

entific responsibility and original thinking that will help our readers treat patients better, without misleading them about the merits or importance of a diagnostic regimen, technique, or appliance. True ingenuity in orthodontics is so essential, yet so relatively rare, that I would like to keep it alive. Professional smugness and stagnation occur readily enough without any editorial assistance.

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