Change of guard at the Indian Journal of Gastroenterology

Change is vital to life. This is equally true in the case of professional journals. May 2007 marked a change of guard at the *Indian Journal of Gastroenterology* with the laying down of office by Dr Philip Abraham. The Indian Society of Gastroenterology has now passed on the responsibility for steering the *Journal* for the next five years to a team of editors, i.e., an Editor-in-Chief and two Editors looking after the Luminal and Pancreatobiliary, and the Hepatology sections, respectively. This occasion warrants a relook at the *Journal’s* history and progress, and the plans for its future development.

The *Journal* was started in the year 1982 with Dr B J Vakil as the editor. Because of his untimely death in the same year, the reins of the *Journal* were handed over to Dr F P Antia who edited it till 1990. Thereafter, Dr S R Naik shouldered the responsibility for a period of six years. In 1996, the baton was passed over to Dr Philip Abraham, who had already been an Associate Editor of the *Journal* since 1987.

Dr Abraham is a quiet, witty, and dynamic person, and prefers to remain incognito. Like his predecessor, he is almost allergic to compliments. Dr F P Antia, the pioneer of the *Journal* wrote in the Decade Supplement Issue of the *Journal*: “Dr Naik then discovered a gem in Dr Abraham who has the energy to work 20 hours a day overhauling manuscripts. English language flows in his blood and his hawk eyes could spot mistakes and quirks in grammar and style (even in the dark, should I add!). Philip resisted the temptation to work 21 hours a day.”

During Dr Abraham’s leadership, the *Journal* underwent several major changes. These included introduction of new columns, including Case Snippets, Controversies, Clinicopathology Conferences. In keeping with international trends, the *Journal* went online in 1999. The *Journal* has done well under his able leadership, and a recent calculation using citation data from the *Science Citation Analysis* showed that the *Journal’s* impact factor had increased from 0.192 in the year 1990 to reach 0.384 and 0.667 in the years 2005 and 2006, respectively. The detailed account of the *Journal’s* progress over the last 25 years is available in a supplement issue published earlier this year.

Science has made rapid progress in India since independence. India has an excellent standing in the world today in the field of medical science. In the field of gastroenterology too, India has made major strides, and Indian gastroenterologists are currently in the forefront of innovation and change. Thus, it is perhaps only a matter of time before the *Journal* also reflects this change and moves to a higher place in the pecking order of academic gastroenterology.

It is a fact of life that most Indian gastroenterologists prefer to publish their work in journals abroad rather than in the *Indian Journal of Gastroenterology*. Interestingly, this has happened while the number of submissions to the *Journal* from other countries has gone up. There may be several reasons for this. First, this may be related to the fact that ‘international’ journals have high impact factors, whereas the *Indian Journal of Gastroenterology* does not currently have an official impact factor. Another may be the insistence of the selection committees and other bodies assessing research output of individuals in our country giving preference to papers published in the journals abroad than to those published in Indian journals. Though we cannot do much about the latter issue, we will accord a high priority to improving the impact factor of the *Journal* over the next few years. However, the quality issue is somewhat of a ‘catch 22’ problem. The failure to receive good articles results in a lower impact factor, and vice versa, a vicious circle of sorts.

Beginning in January 2008, we expect to introduce several changes in the format, content and review process of the *Journal*. Physically, the appearance of the *Journal* is likely to change in several aspects including the cover, the paper on which it is printed, the print styles and the organization of contents, in order to bring it in line with the current trends in the field. The *Journal* will continue to primarily target original articles in the fields of gastroenterology, endoscopy and hepatology. Original research work that does not demand a detailed presentation as ‘Original Articles’ will now be published as ‘Short Articles’. The ‘Case Snippets’ will be discontinued once we exhaust printing the papers already accepted for this section. ‘Case Reports’ will be published only
when these provide new insights into disease mechanisms or management approaches, such that they fulfill requirements similar to those for ‘Original Articles’. The Journal will now include a new section ‘Case Series’, which will report on collections of similar cases that are of some rarity. The number of ‘Reviews’ will be increased; these will be invited from professionals and scientists of considerable standing to provide a state-of-the-art interpretation of the literature in their specific field of interest. These and other changes will be detailed in the January 2008 issue of the Journal and on the Journal website (http://www.indianjgastro.com).

Appointment of a team of editors has also led to some changes in the functioning of the Journal. With this increase in the number of editors, we hope to provide a quicker turnaround regarding editorial and publication decisions. Manuscripts pertaining to luminal gastroenterology and pancreatobiliary sections will be reviewed by the Section Editor for Gastroenterology (BSR), whereas manuscripts pertaining to hepatology will be reviewed by the Section Editor for Hepatology (RA). The Editor-in-Chief (SJB), besides vetting the decisions of the section editors, will have responsibility for overall co-ordination. As has been our policy in the past, articles submitted from the departments which the Editor(s) belong to will be reviewed by the other two editors to ensure an unbiased assessment. To ensure a quicker response, we are now requesting our reviewers to send in their comments in 2 weeks, down from the usual 3 weeks previously. Also, we are now planning to send out reminders to our reviewers as soon after the expiry of the deadline as possible. We also plan to move from the current system of partial online (via e-mail) submission of manuscripts to a completely online submission system, in an attempt to increase the speed of decision making.

Improvement in functioning and impact of the Journal depends to a large extent on its readers, contributors and reviewers. We request the members of the Indian Society of Gastroenterology to send some of their better original articles to the Journal. We, on our part, promise a quick and transparent review process for the submitted papers. Also, we hope that the reviewers for the Journal, who have always worked tirelessly and helped us in making decisions about the manuscripts, will help us by sending their reviews in the shorter timeline that we now specify. These steps will go a long way in taking the Journal to newer heights.

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References