Since the inclusion of the Croatian Medical Journal into MEDLINE (1998) and Current Contents/Clinical Medicine (1999), the number of manuscripts submitted to it for publication has been continually increasing. This fact required many changes in the Journal and its editorial policy. The editorial board has decided to increase the number of issues published per year from four to six. To improve the scientific quality of the journal, the Croatian Medical Journal Committee of Research Integrity has been established. The committee will actively deal with all aspects of research integrity related to submitted manuscripts. More attention will also be paid to statistical review of the manuscripts. Another innovation, which aims at medical student readership, is the launch of the Student CMJ. It will be published once a year as part of the Croatian Medical Journal. Also, a regular new column under the title Health Watch starts with this year. Hopefully, all these changes will contribute to the Journal’s quality, increase its visibility, and attract a broader readership.

Key words: Croatia; journalism, medical; manuscripts, medical; publishing; scientific misconduct; students, medical; United States Office of Research Integrity

When the Croatian Medical Journal was launched in 1992, no one anticipated that it would take only 6 years for the Journal to become indexed in MEDLINE, and a year more to enter two more bibliographic databases, Current Contents/Clinical Medicine and Science Citation Index-Extended (1). This was a great achievement: the quality of the Journal and its increased visibility were confirmed. Consequently, the number of manuscripts offered for publication in the Croatian Medical Journal also increased, from 82 in 1998 and 130 in 1999 to more than 220 in 2000. Since 1999, the volume of the journal has grown to about 500 pages per year.

Increased Number of submitted Manuscripts

Despite the fact that the number of submissions has almost tripled in the past two years, the editors-in-chief still manage to carefully read and triage every manuscript that arrives in the editorial office. After that, a paper is either sent to reviewers, returned to the authors for improvement, or rejected (1). At present, we cannot estimate whether the increased inflow of manuscripts has resulted in a correspondingly larger number of high-quality papers that reach publication, but the high rejection rate by the editors suggests that it is probably not so. A preliminary analysis of the first 150 manuscripts received in 2000 revealed that 40% were rejected by the editors, that 22% were rejected after reviewers recommended this action, and that 38% were accepted and published. To see whether there has been some measurable change for the better, we will have to wait for the results of the impact factor analysis for the Croatian Medical Journal, but it will not be before 2002.

Increasing the Number of Issues per Year

The publisher of the Croatian Medical Journal, Mr. Wolfgang Pabst, and many other people interested in the work of the journal, have more than once suggested increasing the number of issues published every year. At first, the suggestion coaxed a somewhat weak smile out of the editors, who were already swamped with work. However, in time we realized the inevitability of that big step, and the idea has been accepted. Starting from this year, a new issue of the Journal will be released every second month. This would shorten the time between final acceptance of a manuscript and its publication, facilitate the organization of journal’s issues, and allow a larger number of articles to be published per year. Although our aim is to publish around a hundred papers per year, future issues will probably be thinner, but then again more frequent.

We hope that readers as well as the authors who choose to submit their work to the Croatian Medical Journal will warmly welcome this change of tempo. The
former will grow more accustomed to the Journal when they start receiving it more often, and the later will have to wait a shorter time to see their articles published.

Of course, the editorial team’s workload will become even more demanding, but not impossible to do. Having heard of our problems, the Zagreb Medical School authorities have assigned an administrator to help us on a full time basis. The new pair of hands will definitely ease the frustration that sometimes arises from dealing with the usual but, nevertheless, consuming tasks.

**Launching the Student CMJ**

Following closely the policies of the major medical journals, such as the British Medical Journal and Journal of American Medical Association, we have pondered the possibility of having a student section within the Croatian Medical Journal for quite some time. As the editor of the student BMJ put it – every community needs a forum to debate its ideas, and the student community does too (2). So, with the switch to six issues per year, the moment for launching the Student CMJ has finally arrived. In the beginning, it will be published as part of the Croatian Medical Journal for practical reasons, and our readers will find the first section devoted to medical students and their work while they cover the contents of this February issue of the Croatian Medical Journal. Scientific papers: survey studies, case reports, reviews, and other research reports will form the core of the Student CMJ. Future issues will give room to student authors to describe their interests other than medical. Undoubtedly, there are poets and painters and writers, who would like to publish and share their work with their colleagues. The Student CMJ is open to all medical students, from Croatia and abroad. We invite them to publish on any topic concerning students, to send their work and help making this student medical journal as interesting, fun, and thrilling to read as it is to create it. Graduate physicians and others who write about students or topics that interest students are also more than welcome to write for the student section. Editing of the journal will also be left to a student, who will, of course, have the full support and guidance from the editors of the Croatian Medical Journal whenever needed. Dr Dražen Pulanić started preparing this first issue of the Student CMJ while he was still a medical student. Since he has graduated, we invite all the students interested in editing the Student CMJ to apply for the “job”. So far, there have been a few serious candidates.

The purpose of the Student CMJ is primarily educational. It will offer more than just an interesting and educative reading. With it, future clinicians or scientists will be given a chance to prove themselves as investigators and authors, and some of them even as editors of a medical journal. They will also have the opportunity to gain basic knowledge in research, to practice scientific writing and writing in general, and to develop awareness, which is not of least importance, of how slowly and painstakingly science advances. This experience will be of invaluable use to them in their profession.

Launching the Student CMJ represents another effort of the editors of the Croatian Medical Journal in educating physicians not only how to write and publish their scientific work, but also how to design their research. It was a logical continuation of their overall teaching activity, from the author-friendly policy of the Croatian Medical Journal (1), to organizing workshops on medical writing in cooperation with major journals, such as The Lancet, to participation in the Medical School curriculum (the second year course “Introduction to Scientific Research” has been held by the editors of the Croatian Medical Journal).

**Health Watch**

Health Watch will be published in every issue of the Croatian Medical Journal. Slobodan Lang, MD, will discuss various health issues and the importance of health in economical, philosophical, political, epidemiological, ecological, and social, terms. In his words, "People, health care, environment – there lie Croatian resources. Attending to these resources does not represent a burden but a challenge to our country; to every country. We have to recognize, cherish, improve, maintain, and watch over our wealth. We need to realize the importance of this – we need health watch." As health has the utmost importance and represents the greatest value in our lives, we hope that no issue connected to it will be spared from the sharp pen of Dr Lang.

**Scientific Integrity Standards**

Why did we decide to address the issue of scientific integrity? (3). We have a general interest in the subject, and we have sometimes had to question the integrity of authors of work submitted to us. This uncertainty and interest prompted us to try to confront these issues in a systematic manner and in accordance with internationally accepted standards (3). Our contacts with the Office for Research Integrity of the National Institutes of Health, Bethesda (MD), USA (4), inspired us to establish our own body for dealing with the issues of scientific integrity. So, the Croatian Medical Journal Committee for Research Integrity was founded and Mladen Petrovečki, a professor at the Rijeka University School of Medicine and Statistical Editor of the Croatian Medical Journal, was chosen to be the first to receive adequate education in research integrity. He will also head the Committee, whose members are Dr Biserka Belica, Dr Vedran Katavić, and Dr Aleksandra Mišak. All cases in which editors suspect any kind of scientific misconduct will be forwarded to the Committee. The Committee will investigate: (a) every case in which the assignment of authorship is suspected to be outside the recommended standards (5), which are explicitly stated in the Croatian Medical Journal Guidelines for Authors (5) and the Journal’s Authorship Statement that the corresponding author signs if the paper is accepted for peer review; (b) potentially duplicate publications; and (c) “salami” publications (6), which seem to emerge more often than before. The Committee will also establish a system of continuous follow-up of such cases and assess the level of scientific misconduct associated with the journal. Further, the Ministry of Science and Technology of the Republic of Croatia has been advised to establish a national committee for research integrity and to regulate the organization and activities of the national committee through the Act of High Education of the Republic of Croatia, which is currently being rewritten and re-discussed (7). We cannot guarantee that the state administration will follow our ad-
vice, accept our offer, or indeed influence the Croatian scientific community in the suggested way, but we are certain that the Journal’s Committee will contribute to the upgrading of the integrity of the scientific work published in our pages.

Growing Importance of Statistical Editors

The editors of major journals rely greatly on the judgment of their statistical editors (statisticians), whose opinion is often crucial in editorial decisions about acceptance or rejection. In principle, statistical analysis and its presentation in a manuscript has to be correct, clear, and adjusted to the readership’s profile (8). A preliminary, retrospective analysis of the statistical quality of manuscripts that the Croatian Medical Journal receives, done by our Statistical Editor, Dr Ivan Krešimir Lukić, has shown that there has been an unacceptably high proportion of statistically unsatisfactory reports. This finding prompted us to introduce a far more strict statistical evaluation of manuscripts undergoing a standard peer-review procedure and engage a second statistical editor to carefully assess manuscripts containing any statistical presentation of results.

Plans and Expectations – Summary

The changes we introduced a year ago – setting high international standards in the journal and clearly defining the editorial policy (1) – could be defined as predominately qualitative. The changes that escort us into 2001 could be described as quantitative – more manuscripts, more issues, more statistical editors, more workers in the office, more regular columns… Hopefully, the journal’s visibility and impact factor will show the shift in the same direction.

However, we will continue to cherish our author-friendly policy (1) and work with authors on the preparation of their manuscripts. Also, we will try to make the workshops in Medical Writing a tradition. We hope that the young journal, the Student CMJ, will be well accepted and that more manuscripts received by the Croatian Medical Journal will pass the strict tests of their originality, scientific integrity, and statistical well-foundedness, making their authors as proud of writing as we are of publishing sound scientific work.

References

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