Almost half a century ago, a series of remarkable therapeutic developments occurred and were soon recognised as milestones in the history of medicine. The introduction of lithium, chlorpromazine, imipramine and the monoamine oxidase inhibitors, within a few years of each other, radically altered the prospects for treating serious psychiatric disorders. Until then, electroconvulsive therapy had been the only definitive treatment available. Research on pharmacological agents that alleviate disturbances of mood, cognition and behaviour, was given an impetus that led to quantum expansion in the ensuing years. It has become customary to recount the history of neuropsychopharmacology from that time. Although this is an understandable bias, it ignores much fundamental research in neurophysiology, neurochemistry and pharmacology and clinical experimentation with psychoactive agents that laid the foundations for what was to follow. Nevertheless, neuropsychopharmacology is still a very young discipline. This manifests not only in chronology but in the ferment, rapid shifts in priorities and fluidity of fundamental concepts that are hallmarks of youth. The critical observer cannot but concede the likelihood that tenets held basic to contemporary neuropsychopharmacology could turn out to be substantially over emphasised, unacceptably simplistic or even incorrect, in the relatively near future. Perusal of major papers in the field, published no more than one or two decades ago, confirms this impression. Rather than detracting from the discipline, these attributes are what give neuropsychopharmacology its remarkable allure. There is the distinct feeling that much of what can be known has yet to be discovered. Steps equal to or greater in impact than those of half a century ago, wait to be taken.

Developments in neuropsychopharmacology are closely linked to developments in the broad field of neuroscience. The relationship is bilateral; a number of fundamental concepts and techniques applied to other branches of neuroscience had their origins in research on psychotropic drugs and their effects on brain function. Molecular technologies are achieving a central position in the field. Rather than eclipsing behavioural, biochemical and electrophysiological techniques, they have highlighted the importance of these classical approaches to a discipline in which function is not only a crucial variable but the ultimate target. In clinical neuropsychopharmacology research, two developments hold major, though by no means exclusive, promise. A variety of neuroimaging techniques provide the neuropsychopharmacologist with the capacity to visualise in living, human brain, processes that could only be indirectly studied until recently and to address biochemical and pharmacological questions that were previously limited to in vitro experiments or animal models. A second major development is in the area of genetics. Enormous resources are being directed towards the discovery of genes that confer vulnerability to major psychiatric disorders. This commitment is based on the conviction that the discovery of such genes will open the way to an understanding of aetiology and pathogenesis and to the development of new and more effective treatments. Although results have been disappointing to date and the degree of commitment to this approach has its critics, the potential contribution of psychiatric genetic research to neuropsychopharmacology, remains exceptional. Moreover, the role of genetic factors in response to psychotropic drugs is a largely untapped field.

Drugs which influence the human psyche are used for non-therapeutic purposes considerably more frequently than for treatment in the medical context. Abuse of psychoactive substances is, therefore, a central concern of neuropsychopharmacology. The neurobiological mechanisms which underlie addiction and dependence are the focus of intensive research. They promise important developments in the treatment of what is recognised to be one of society’s major concerns. Paradoxically, the members of the same society are achieving increasing longevity and are increasingly affected by Alzheimer’s disease and other dementia disorders. Consequently, drugs which improve cognitive function and those which protect against neurodegeneration are very high on the neuropsychopharmacological agenda.

Developments in clinical psychiatry are pivotal to neuropsychopharmacology. It is remarkable that so much progress has been made in treating disorders whose causes are essentially unknown. When, eventually, these basic answers are obtained, the impact will be enormous. Until then, the pathological entities for which new drugs are sought must be based on clinical definitions alone. While the limitations of this approach are clear, operational diagnostic approaches have achieved critically important standardisation. In general, the rigour of clinical research is continually increasing. This is particularly true of clinical trials methodology, a development prompted to a great extent by the demands of regulatory agencies. While recognising this as a positive development, many are concerned that drugs are being tested under conditions that are increasingly different from regular clinical practice and on subjects who bear less and less resemblance to the average patient.

There are many ethical issues that are of central concern to neuropsychopharmacology and can be expected to become even more challenging. The first salvoes are already being fired in what can be expected to become a major debate over the use of psychopharmacologic agents.
by people who are essentially healthy. This includes drugs which affect mood, memory and other cognitive processes, anxiety in certain social circumstances and sexual performance. Ultimately, scientists and clinicians will need to take positions on these issues. Another debate, already in progress, regards clinical research including placebo-controlled trials, in two circumstances in particular – patients whose capacity to give informed consent may be regarded as impaired according to some definitions and patients with conditions for which effective treatment is available. Emphasis given to the latter category varies from country to country, with the definition of effective treatment that is applied and with views on the autonomous right of the patient to participate in research. The outcome of these debates could have major implications for the way in which clinical neuropsychopharmacological research is conducted.

Into this complex but exciting arena strides The International Journal of Neuropsychopharmacology (IJNP). As the official scientific journal of the Collegium Internationale Neuro-psychopharmacologicum (CINP), IJNP comes into the world bearing the stature of association with a prestigious scientific organisation that has an impressive history of achievement. In our times, nobility of birth is no guarantee of success. IJNP will need to prove itself in a crowded arena by carving out a unique niche. It will need to provide its readers with a publication that serves different needs while adhering to the highest scientific standards. The central focus of the Journal will be on high quality, original research in the basic and clinical domains, which advances understanding of existing and new neuropsychopharmacological agents, including their mode of action and clinical application. Research that provides insights into the biological basis of neuropsychiatric disorders and thereby advances their pharmacological treatment is clearly encompassed under this objective. IJNP will take a broad, multidisciplinary view of neuropsychopharmacology. Accordingly, the research we will publish may derive from the full spectrum of biological and psychological fields of inquiry, encompassing classical and novel techniques in neuropsychopharmacology as well as strategies such as neuroimaging, genetics, psychoneuroendocrinology and neuropsychology. At the same time, we recognise the need to consolidate and evaluate. Accordingly, IJNP will publish scholarly, comprehensive reviews that critically assess important topics, consider future implications and propose heuristic hypotheses. It is also clear to us that the neuropsychopharmacologist cannot possibly keep abreast of developments in all the fields that are relevant to his or her specific area of interest. Our Trends and Perspectives section will provide focused overviews and commentaries that address this need and will also serve as a forum for the publication of hypotheses, opinion papers and historical features. Our correspondence section is intended to be lively and provocative as well as providing short reports which alert readers to potentially important clinical observations or preliminary research findings.

Rapid review and publication have become an essential declaration in the opening statement of any new journal and for established publications that are recreating themselves in a newer image. IJNP is committed to this policy and has adhered to its commitment in the review of papers leading up to this first issue. As active researchers, the Editors are fully aware that authors wish to see their findings in print with minimal delay and we will consistently address this legitimate wish, although not at the expense of scientific quality. To accommodate truly groundbreaking work and findings for which priority of publication is of pivotal importance to the authors, papers of this type will be assigned to a particularly fast track. To keep abreast of the speed of information flow, the Journal and its Publisher are firmly committed to electronic publication and are already working in this direction.

Contact with authors, reviewers and readers, and responsiveness to their concerns, is an important priority for the Editors of IJNP. We ask you to bring your suggestions and criticisms to our attention by letter, fax or E-mail. We welcome pre-submission consultation, particularly regarding Reviews and papers for the Trends and Perspectives section.

While the conception of The International Journal of Neuropsychopharmacology was a very long process, its birth was remarkably rapid once the decision was taken to proceed. It is appropriate that in this first issue the important contribution of certain individuals be recognised – in particular, Claude de Montigny, President of the CINP and the members of the Executive Committee, and Igor Grant, Chair of the CINP Publications Committee and his colleagues. The CINP Executive and Council have given IJNP their unreserved support while categorically guaranteeing its scientific and editorial independence. An excellent working relationship has been established with our publishers, Cambridge University Press. As Editors we will strive to insure the success of this important endeavour and to provide CINP members and the scientific community at large with a truly unique journal which will inform, stimulate and advance this exciting field.

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