IJNP: a decade in perspective

The International Journal of Neuropsychopharmacology (IJNP) was officially founded in September, 1997 at a meeting of the Executive Committee of the CINP in Vienna. Then CINP President, Claude de Montigny and the Chair of the Publications Committee, Igor Grant, played a pivotal role. I was asked to accept the position of Founding Editor-in-Chief and did so with considerable enthusiasm as well as significant reservations about starting a journal de novo in an already crowded and highly competitive field. The decade that followed has been one of the most fascinating and rewarding of my professional career. I recommended the appointment of Field Editors (Steve Stahl, Alan Frazer, Lars Farde and Klaus-Peter Lesch) and in consultation with them an Editorial Board. Initial submissions were on paper and sent in by air-mail; the first issue of the journal appeared in July 1998.

Since then IJNP has made steady progress with submissions rising each year (Figure 1). Page extents and issue numbers have increased proportionately and the journal now has eight issues per year and a total of 1152 pages. Increasing competition for space has led to acceptance levels dropping to around 25% (Figure 2). My 10-year service as Editor-in-Chief of IJNP coincided with a historic decade for scientific publishing as a whole. During this period we went from submissions by mail to fax and email handling of papers and reviews and then to a fully online, paperless submission and review system administered by Manuscript Central that was implemented in January 2005. IJNP was one of the first of the Cambridge University Press journals to go fully online.

During my tenure as Editor-in-Chief, my work and that of my editorial colleagues was gratifyingly successful in terms of standard indicators and also feedback from the CINP Executive, CINP members and readers in general. The impact factor of IJNP rose steadily (Figure 3), reaching 5.18 in 2006, which placed the journal eighth out of 95 journals in psychiatry, dropping slightly to 4.89 in 2007. My philosophy was to maintain a balance between high-profile scientific papers and papers relevant to the practising clinician, cutting-edge research reports and reviews. This approach was much appreciated by the clinicians and clinical scientists among the journal’s readers.

As I hand over the reins of IJNP to my successors, I do so against the background of a brief consideration of future developments in psychopharmacology, as my Field Editors and I did ten years ago when we launched the Journal with an inaugural Editorial (Lerer et al., 1998). In terms of its primary and immediate goals – the development of novel, more effective and safer pharmacological agents for the treatment of psychotic illnesses, mood and anxiety disorders and dementia – the next five years appear to promise incremental advances rather than spectacular developments in the field of neuropsychopharmacology. Any prediction is subject to change and the new Editors will need to monitor preclinical developments and novel agents in the pipeline in order to be aware of the directions in which the field is heading. In the field of therapeutics, novel brain stimulation techniques are arousing increasing interest. Although focused on depression at this stage, application to obsessive compulsive disorder is already under way and expansion to schizophrenia and other indications can be anticipated. Related to the development of therapeutic brain stimulation is the burgeoning field of brain imaging in which a host of advanced techniques are providing high-resolution insights into brain function that are highly relevant to neuropsychopharmacology. While molecular genetics has not realized its promise of providing a short cut to aetiology, pathogenesis and novel treatments, important findings continue to emerge and major technical advances continue to fuel the development of the field. Two additional areas that should be closely monitored are addiction psychopharmacology and child and adolescent psychopharmacology, the latter notwithstanding recent ethical concerns.

Another area of great importance is the future of scientific publishing, particularly with respect to journals. Scientific publishing is already in the throes of a revolution that is bringing major changes to the field. Some aspects of this revolution are firmly established in the mainstream. These include paperless online review and submission systems, online publication of papers in HTML and PDF formats and online only elements that are growing in importance vis-à-vis the hard copy of papers. Fewer and fewer people actually see the journals that publish the papers they write, read and cite and even fewer actually subscribe to them, particularly in paper format (unless they are part of a society membership package). Libraries...
increasingly prefer electronic subscriptions and many learned societies (including the CINP) are considering phasing out the paper versions of their journals or reducing their size in favour of online elements. It is clear that disappearance of the majority of paper journals is only a matter of time. If so, an important question that must be addressed is whether the journal format per se will remain viable. When articles are published online immediately after being accepted, typeset and proofed, and no print edition follows, there is very little logic in maintaining a formal structure of volume and page numbers. Similarly, the cover has little meaning in such a situation. Whether journals should evolve into electronic, scientific portals that publish peer-reviewed papers as a key element among other services provided to the reader, is a development that needs to be considered. A fascinating scenario is that scientific journals be downloadable as such and read on the type of apparatus used for downloaded electronic books. Such a development could allow retention of the traditional journal format. In either case, a development that the field cannot ignore is the stipulation by NIH that papers derived from NIH-funded work be made available online immediately on acceptance. If this policy is adopted by other funding agencies, it will undercut the primary selling point that journals have, the proprietary publication of high-quality scientific papers. Interestingly, open access journals are more likely to be affected by this development than regular journals since authors and agencies who now bear the cost of open access publication are unlikely to pay for the publication of papers that are already in the public domain!

With these thoughts I conclude my service as Editor-in-Chief of IJNP and hand over the reins to Alan Frazer and his excellent Editorial team. I am deeply grateful to the Field Editors (Jarmo Hietala replaced Lars Farde a few years ago) for their outstanding contribution, to Cambridge University Press for the close working relationship we developed, to Irena Luna for her impeccable service as Journal Administrator from the very outset and to the CINP Executive for their consistent support. I relinquished the post of Editor-in-Chief of my own volition, feeling that a decade in that position was sufficient, being ready to move on to new challenges. I am gratified to leave a thriving journal in the hands of a highly qualified successor and am certain that in the coming years IJNP will not only maintain but increase its prominence in the field of neuropsychopharmacology.

References

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