Foreword

A forum for editors, associate editors, publishers and others with an interest in scientific literature was held on 20th March 2013, just before the opening of the annual meeting of the International Association for Dental Research (IADR), which this year was held in Seattle, USA. The forum considered the question, what will be the challenges in publishing scientific literature in 20 years time? Over 100 delegates attended the forum. It took the form of a panel discussion with questions from the audience. The panellists were Professor Will Giannobile (editor of the *Journal of Dental Research*), Professor Rex Holland (editor of the *Archives of Oral Biology*), Dr Stephen Hancocks (editor of the *British Dental Journal*) and Professor Peter Robinson (editor of the *Biomed Central Oral Health*). The forum was chaired by Professor Kenneth Eaton (editor of *Oral Health and Dental Management*).

Each panel member suggested five topics for discussion. Some related to current difficulties that biomedical journals are encountering and some looked to the future. There was agreement that many more papers than five years ago were being submitted to most, if not all, journals with a Medline listing. Current difficulties include: the poor quality of many papers, difficulty in recruiting peer reviewers and an apparent rise in the occurrence of plagiarism. All these problems may occur because of the pressure on academic staff to publish. However, if authors do not know how to perform research to the highest standards and/or how to structure scientific papers, then poor-quality papers will result. Sometimes this problem occurs because the authors are lazy and do not take care to ensure that their research and the resulting papers meet the highest standards. However, often the problem lies with their teachers, who may be deans, heads of department or professors. If the teachers are ignorant of the standards required and do not check to ensure that they are met, can their staff be blamed for their inadequacies?

The forum concluded that the growing problem of plagiarism arose for a number of reasons. The first was that young authors often did not realise that they should not reproduce the words of others without citing their origin. A further aspect of this problem appears to be cultural. In some countries, it is usual for junior staff and postgraduate students to copy or cite material written by their professors as a mark of respect to those professors. They are also often uncritical of the material.

The problem with a lack of suitable peer reviewers also has a number of causes, one of which is the explosion in the number of papers that are being submitted to journals. The fact that reviewers generally gain no acknowledgement for their work, either in terms of academic recognition or pay, is another factor. The forum suggested that journals should in future consider paying reviewers but only if they submitted comprehensive reviews. In order to do so, they would have to charge those who submitted papers. A further suggestion was that if an author had a paper accepted by a journal, he or she would be required to review a paper for that journal to an approved standard.

As far as the future is concerned, it was suggested that in 20 years' time, there will be far wider use of information technology with most papers published only online or in whatever electronic format exists in the future. The papers may well include video sequences to explain the methods used and be automatically screened electronically to eliminate any papers with plagiarism or those that did not follow to the letter the journal's guidelines for authors.

This latter problem occurs in many of the papers that are submitted to *Oral Health and Dental Management*. In future, when a research paper is submitted to this journal, it will be assessed against the preliminary checklist that appears on page 122 of this edition and also on the journal's website (www.oralhealth.ro). If the paper does not meet all the requirements, it will not be sent out for peer review but will be returned to its authors.

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