
EDITORIAL

What About APJCP Editorial Policy ? Important Odds and Ends at the Start of 2001

Having survived the first year of publication intact, and indeed with the Founding Conference of the APOCP (Deerasamee, 2000) and the Official Opening of the APOCP Training Centre (News in this volume) behind us, it is perhaps time to take stock and set priorities for the future. A glance at the Table of proportions of papers published in the different major areas of cancer prevention in 2000 suggests that while an overall balance has been achieved, the coverage of screening and intervention could be improved, given the obvious importance to secondary prevention.

To a large extent the emphasis on toxicological pathology, especially with regard to reviews, reflects the background of many of the instigators of the APOCP in Japan and Korea as well as the stress placed on carcinogen testing and chemoprevention in these countries. While it has been possible to make up for the lack of reviews in education and smoking by editorial emphasis, the specialist members of the editorial team, with Kazuo Tajima now as the official Chief Editor, hope that we can accomplish a more even representation as we proceed into 2001.

A start in the direction of publication of a journal with amelioration of "defects" (Moore, 2000) has been made but there remains a great deal to be done. In this regard it is to be hoped that we will be able to generate more feed-back from the members of the APOCP in the future. Perhaps the efforts that are now underway to expand our all-too-limited readership will bring more suggestions and proposals that can be discussed at the First General Assembly meeting to be held in Pattaya in November of this year. We are still missing individuals taking responsibility for many of the specialist areas under the cancer prevention umbrella and

hope to include more scientists from under-represented countries in the near future. The aim is to have three for each discipline.

To return to the categories of papers published, the recent editorial by Shields (2000) on publication bias and the case for a section for null results is of clear interest. The report by Hamajima et al (2001) in the present volume is instructive in this context, no links with colorectal cancer in Japanese being found with any of the tested polymorphisms related to inflammation. As described by many authors, there is a tendency for studies with nonsignificant results to remain unpublished, either because of self suppression by authors due to preconceptions about gaining acceptance of publication in reputable journals or because of real difficulties with referees. The proportion of studies involved may be considerable (Scherer et al., 1994) and at the very least there is evidence that statistically significant studies are published more rapidly (Stern and Simes, 1997).

Obviously publication bias can exert a detrimental impact, possibly acting as a disincentive for certain types of investigation and leading to potentially false conclusions. In epidemiology there may be overestimation of risks, for example of environmental tobacco smoke (Misakian and Bero, 1998). While it can be argued that studies which have not undergone rigorous peer review should not be included, for example, in meta-analyses (Cook et al., 1993), their exclusion could be considered unethical (Cleophas and Cleophas, 1999). Indeed failure to publish our results is not in line with the trust implicit in accepting funding for research. In a sense there is already a form of peer review at the stage of applying for grants, hopefully constituting a check to maintain quality of research with appropriate choice of

Table. Proportions of Papers Published in the APJCP in 2000 in the Four Main Areas of Cancer Prevention

Subjects	Review	Res Communication	Editorial/Commentary	Total
Education/ Smoking	0	7	7	14
Epidemiology	3	5	2	10
Toxicological Pathology	6	7	2	15
Screening/Intervention	1	4	3	8

methodology and parameters for investigation. The question therefore arises as to what the editorial policy of journals like the APJCP should be. Should peer review be aimed at deciding to accept or reject, or rather to arrive at decisions as to the form in which acceptance is to be recommended, naturally with the proviso that the material submitted is relevant to cancer prevention. It is conceivable that this would guarantee that authors would have no reservations about submitting work lacking any demonstration of significant influence.

To overcome the problem of space limitations, we could envisage a shortening of papers so that unnecessary repetition is avoided by applying model formats, relying on Figures and Tables to a greater extent than is presently the case. Particularly in the toxicological pathology area, where many methods are very well established, schematic illustration of the experimental protocol can allow considerable savings in the Materials and Methods. The same is the case for Tables in the Results section, as exemplified in the present issue by the paper by Thamavit et al (2001). Speculation as to the significance of the results can be minimized. Given the financial difficulties with expensive sophisticated techniques for elucidating mechanisms, it might be more appropriate for a journal primarily catering to Asia to provide a relatively simple avenue to publication of results of interest in the international arena, which might otherwise not find favour because they are not at the cutting edge in terms of molecular biology, for example.

However, this does not preclude maintaining standards, and especially in the review and mini-review areas it is hoped that comprehensive coverage of the literature with avoidance of reference bias (Gotzsche, 1987) will continue to be the goal. The prime raison d'être of the APOCP is to stimulate and support collaborative efforts across the Asian Pacific region and in order to encourage participation more stress should perhaps be placed on the Collaborative Research Forum type of paper (see Moore and Tokudome, 2000) and Policy and Practice (see Varghese et al., 2000). For the first time the present issue includes a separate News section, to report on the opening of our APOCP Training Centre in Bangkok, and we herewith would like to call on any person with information of scientific or human interest to workers in cancer prevention or details of noteworthy events to please submit succinct reports to the Editorial Office in Thailand.

We have deliberately set out to be provocative in the present editorial in the hope of stimulating correspondence from those in the Asian Pacific who are interested in improving our journal, with the emphasis firmly on shared responsibility. Our Correspondence section has so far been conspicuous only by its absence. Hopefully, with your participation this will change for the better in the not too distant future!

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