EDITORIAL

Enhancing the Journal

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The Canadian Journal of Gastroenterology continues to grow in strength as a national journal of importance to gastroenterologists and hepatologists. As the official journal of both the Canadian Association of Gastroenterology and the Canadian Association for the Study of the Liver, it also serves as an important tool for the dissemination of guidelines and standards for the entire medical community in Canada. We should be proud of these accomplishments. But one also needs to ask, can the Journal be better? Is there something more that can be achieved? Some would say the status quo is fine. But realistically, we regularly look to the journals of our sister associations in the United States and the United Kingdom – Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Gut – for the latest and best in our field. So, I would argue, we can achieve more and make the Journal better.

Does the Journal reflect the quality of gastroenterology and hepatology in Canada? Yes, to some extent it does, yet something is missing. Canadian gastroenterologists and hepatologists can be found as speakers, chairs and participants at virtually every important international meeting in our fields, in all spheres of activity; indeed, many of our scientists and clinicians are world renowned leaders. The Canadian community will be proudly and justifiably highlighted by the World Congress in 2005 and won the bid for this meeting in large measure because of the excellence and reputation of our community. Thus, despite the international prominence of Canadian gastroenterology and hepatology, what is missing is that many of us rarely send examples of our best work to our own Journal. It seems to me that what we lack is the confidence to admit our Journal could be as good as that of other national journals. Where does this other work go? Most of it ends up in leading ‘specialist’ journals. These are publications specific to a subfield of academic endeavor. However, there is no reason why some of this fine work could not find its way to The Canadian Journal of Gastroenterology. Our Journal can become well respected if we as a community embrace it as a ‘leading journal’ and publish in it, as our colleagues in the United States and Europe do with their association journals.

This sounds simple, and it is, but there are some other issues that must be overcome. There are barriers to publication in the Journal: some real and some not. I have heard the view that papers in The Canadian Journal of Gastroenterology are judged negatively by Canadian grant review panels. I currently serve on the Experimental Medicine peer-review panel of CIHR where most of the GI and Liver grants are reviewed. I have never been present when an applicant’s papers were disparaged by anyone on this panel, no matter where they were published. We do not use a journal impact factor (a bibliometric descriptor of a journal’s ‘quality’) to judge a grant or an applicant. There is no doubt that a person whose work is published in leading journals will make a strong impression on the committee, but it is a combination of the applicant, their environment and the grant itself that makes up the final score that decides whether a grant is funded or not. Other grant panels may do things differently, but I doubt it. We must speak up if our colleagues refer to publications in the Journal in a pejorative manner and move on from these misperceptions that Canadian journals are somehow inferior. Canadians have no reason to be apologetic about their journals, their work or the country that funded it.

Currently, the Journal does not have online submission. This is correctly seen as barrier by some people. This issue has been addressed and online submission will be available in the next few months. Another concern is that the Journal review
process is slow. This is sometimes true. Online submission and tracking will improve this situation. The editorial office and the publisher are committed to improving the turnaround and handling of manuscripts.

What does it take to get the Journal elevated to the status of an international journal with a high impact factor? The Journal needs a strategy to gain greater prominence by getting reviews and other highly cited materials. We have solicited reviews from all speakers at Canadian Digestive Diseases Week and will continue this. Last year we had a very strong response from speakers, including the McKenna Lecturer, and we anticipate a similar response from this year’s Canadian Digestive Diseases Week participants. Most importantly, we need you and your colleagues to send the journal articles that you and your peers will cite. The Editor-in-Chief and his Board are committed to the Journal and will do their best to promote the Journal and publish in it. The Boards of the Canadian Association of Gastroenterology and the Canadian Association for the Study of the Liver continue to strongly endorse the Journal. As a community, we need to reflect on this matter and take actions that show our commitment to furthering Canadian gastroenterology and hepatology through publication of high quality clinical and basic research, health care and health services research, and interesting case reports in The Canadian Journal of Gastroenterology.