A new year and a new plan for the Journal

The new year traditionally brings with it new plans and resolutions, and a changing business climate. This year is no exception – especially in the Canadian medical publishing industry. Many changes are forecast for this year and for upcoming years. Historically, virtually all Canadian medical publishers have relied on advertising for the majority of their revenues, with additional income derived from the sale of international subscriptions (Canadian physicians receive their Canadian journals free of charge) and the sale of reprints. All three of these sources have been trending lower in the past several years, and will again be substantially lower in 2014. With the plethora of online open-access information, readers/researchers are less willing to pay for subscriptions and libraries are cutting back due to budget constraints. The ease of printing and e-mailing articles has led to a decrease in the sale of author reprints. Additionally, increasingly strict regulations covering the distribution of reprints by drug companies have similarly affected the sales of multiple reprints.

This brings us to advertising – until recently, the ‘bread and butter’ of our business model. The Pharmaceutical Advertising Advisory Board – the agency that approves pharmaceutical advertising – has rescinded the requirement for printed prescribing information in journals. In our case, this has decreased advertisement revenues by approximately 30%. Unfortunately, this does not fully describe the impact on revenues because with budget cuts in the pharmaceutical industry, advertising is often the first to be affected. Our projected revenue, similar to other medical peer-reviewed journals, is expected to be substantially lower compared with last year, which was already lower than the previous year. We can only speculate on what has caused these budget cuts (eg, industry mergers, lack of new drug launches, generics, weak economy), and when and if the situation will improve.

If this trend continues, it may be the advertisers who are most adversely affected; furthermore, they may eventually lose the ability to advertise in medical journals altogether. There is a movement afoot to this effect, proposing that Canadian Medical Association members support their journals through a relatively small fee while eliminating all advertising. By not seizing this opportunity while it is available, advertisers are denying themselves the chance to reach their audience in the most economical manner possible while visibly supporting Canadian research.

The current issue of the Canadian Journal of Infectious Diseases & Medical Microbiology contains two advertisements. We are grateful to Gilead Sciences and QIAGEN for realizing the importance of advertising in the Journal. However, were we to rely only on revenues from such a small number of advertisers, this Journal would simply not exist. It exists solely because of revenue generated from page charges instituted two years ago, when the Journal moved toward an open-access format. We were able to maintain a relatively low page charge fee for the first two years while we continued to receive meaningful advertising revenue; however, we now must increase the charges to $300 per page for all new submissions. This change will be effective for all articles submitted in 2014 onward, and will not apply to articles already submitted or accepted for publication at the end of 2013. These charges continue to weigh very favourably with the majority of comparable open-access peer-reviewed medical journals – some of which charge a flat rate in excess of $2,000 for publication – and, unlike other open-access journals, the Canadian Journal of Infectious Diseases & Medical Microbiology will also continue as a print publication due to the popularity of the format with authors and readers.

There are several other positive changes set to occur in 2014. We will be moving to an open-access Creative Commons license and have reached an agreement with the National Library of Medicine for immediate full-text indexing after publication. In addition, consistent with its reputation as a world-class journal and with the solid support from the Editor-in-Chief, Editorial Board and AMMI Canada, 2014 will also witness a return to six issues per year and the expansion of the Journal into the electronic realm of apps. The increase from four to six issues per year will enable us to publish a substantially larger volume of scientific research while also decreasing the time from acceptance to publication. As we move forward in 2014, we will confront new challenges, but also encounter exciting new opportunities that will benefit authors and readers of the Journal, and significantly contribute to the medical literature.

Robert B Kalina,
Publisher