

Editorial

Where to publish European Medical Science?

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When the European Society for Clinical Investigation was cloned from its American ancestor, it was intended to be the home for young and ambitious European scientists. It took a few years before the Journal of Clinical Investigation was also cloned. The *European Journal of Clinical Investigation* is now in its 28th year, an attractive medium for publishing original work and reviews on mechanisms of human disease, and probably the best non-specialized European journal in this field. The founding fathers of the Society, and the first editors of our Journal, may have expected that both institutions would reach, in adult life, the same prestige and influence as their American examples. Unfortunately these expectations are not yet fulfilled. Despite the fact that the European scientific reservoir at least equals its transatlantic counterpart, both in productivity and in quality, it is true that probably the best publications are floating across the ocean, seeking American journals with higher impact factors. The European contribution to American scientific journals is enormous.

What is the driving force that makes Europeans allow American journals to publish such a significant part of their scientific achievements? One important factor may be the exodus of so many outstanding European scientists who found a new home in the United States, escaping the horrors of fascism and antisemitism. At the same time English became the only acceptable language for scientific communication, whereas before the second world war many Nobel-prize-winning works were published in German and French, whilst English journals were published in the USA and in the UK. Many journals on the European mainland switched to English and an abundant number of new journals emerged. But the strongest positions in scientific publishing were already held, and were maintained by the American journals. A further reason for the persisting superiority of American journals of medical science can be found in the education and training pattern of our investigators. Most European academic seniors have spent one or more productive years in America, and learned to publish their best work in US-based journals. Is it for this reason that the best students are encouraged to follow that example?

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In the time since the inception of *European Journal of Clinical Investigation*, European science has become just as competitive as in the United States. Non-productive investigators lose their jobs, and scientific life without obtaining grants is impossible. Today academic survival depends on external evaluation and on committees monitoring all research groups for quantity and quality of scientific production. Most committees are using the impact factor as an instrument for evaluation of research groups. The impact factor is defined as the mean number of citations a paper in a specific journal obtains during the year of publication and the year thereafter. It is generally recognized that this is a poor instrument, but it is one of the best available. The typically higher impact factor is the major driving force behind seeking an American scientific journal for publication of the most promising work.

What about our journal? The impact factor of the *European Journal of Clinical Investigation* is slightly over two. This figure indicates that the EJCI is already a leading journal in molecular and clinical pathophysiology. But we need to achieve more. To multiply our impact factor requires a change in habit of European scientists who send their best work across the ocean. To stimulate this we try to make our Journal physically more attractive, maintaining a still-digestible size, and we actively pursue an improvement of the quality and originality of scientific contributions. In the last year the service to our main customers, the authors, also improved. Time between receipt and acceptance of papers decreased with the crucial and highly esteemed assistance of our skilled scientific editors and more than 300 anonymous referees. Unfortunately the improvement of quality in a limited space necessitated rejection of an increasing number of papers; at present more than 60% of all regular and 'rapid' submissions. Although it is always a hard decision to refuse a paper, the increase in the rejection rate has already resulted in more original contributions of a higher scientific standard, which will surely be followed by a higher impact factor in the future. It is hoped that this will stimulate scientists from all over the world to submit their best work. It is definitely what they deserve, a top journal, the *European Journal of Clinical Investigation*.