

A warm welcome

It was with great satisfaction that I accepted to contribute a written commentary to the first issue of the ANNALS OF HEPATOLOGY. The task was made easier because of a collegial relation with many of the members of the Editorial team as well as my personal Latin American background. But it is from the editor's perspective where I will focus my thoughts at the launching of this new journal.

Another journal? We seem to be surrounded by an ever-increasing number of publications, stretching our limited time for reading and clobbering our working desks in tall piles of unread issues. But the reason for this growth is the continuous rise in the number of submitted manuscripts and the limited space offered by current journals. For example, HEPATOLOGY receives approximately 1500 original manuscripts a year and accepts only 20-25% of this volume. We are currently publishing 25 original manuscripts a month and our readers still complain of the size of each issue. (The size also reflects the increasing complexity of research, with abundant illustrations, tables and appendices). Examining the overall journal landscape in Liver disease, good manuscripts with data that contribute to the literature require adequate vehicles for their publication.

A journal exists and prospers as the result of an unspoken agreement. Authors know their manuscript will be handled fairly, reviewers devote time to provide an accurate and (hopefully) unbiased assessment and editors make final decisions taking into account disparaging views about the merits of publication. As all human activities, this process is not error-proof. It never ceases to amaze me how the same manuscript can be deemed a "Reject unequivocally" by one reviewer and "Accept" by the second examiner. The saving grace of this process is the rigor of the journal's own readership. A vigorous correspondence section, follow-up manuscripts that confirm or rebut the initial findings, direct communications with the editors, are some of the tools the readership possess to shape the journal into a desired mold. Because authors have been previous reviewers and reviewers will be subsequent authors, a journal is in fact the sum of all these components.

A journal embodies several functions. It is a vehicle for the dissemination of knowledge and publication of origi-

nal research is its main goal. Hepatology is a discipline that crosses many boundaries and HEPATOLOGY has become a vehicle for the publication of work from superb science laboratories. Such a relation fosters growth in the clinical sciences, providing fresh avenues to advance the quest for new therapies in the many unsolved clinical problems in liver disease. We wish the editors success in fostering such relations throughout the continent, tapping on the numerous research-based groups that will welcome such an interaction. A unique role for the journal may also lie in fostering clinical research in Latin America. In this vast land, with millions of people affected with liver disease, concerted efforts to tackle clinical problems in a systematic and scientific way will contribute to the well-being of the population. A journal that becomes a vehicle for this approach to clinical research will quickly become a focus for the entire hepatological community.

A journal is also a valuable educational tool. We complain of our limited availability of time, but we desperately need to be better informed in order to deal with the complexity of problems at the bedside. This need is not met with professorial dissertations but by focusing on the knowledge of mechanisms of disease, on the pathophysiology of clinical problems and a critical evaluation of evidence-based medicine. We wish the editors success in the growth of the educational core of the journal (which many times means prodding writers to contribute on time).

Hepatology has come a long way since my training days, when diseases were unknown (the case of hepatitis C) and liver failure was inexorably associated with death. We have seen major advances in our understanding of the nature and treatment of liver disease. Still, many frontiers need to be crossed. A meaningful contribution of Latin American Hepatology to this process is urgently needed by the entire liver community. We welcome the ANNALS as a critical tool for this goal.

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