Editorial

A monthly Journal of Medical Genetics

The change from publication in alternate months to monthly is not one that a scientific journal undertakes lightly, so in this, the first monthly issue, it is worth outlining the reasons for this step and the benefits that it is hoped will result.

The most obvious, but most important, factor is the continued rapid expansion and development of the field, in both its basic scientific and its applied aspects. This is seen most strikingly in molecular genetics, which over the past three years has become an integral part of medical genetics. Many papers that would until recently have appeared in a purely scientific journal are now directed towards a more clinically orientated readership, such as that of Journal of Medical Genetics.

It is not only molecular genetics that is in a phase of rapid expansion, but all aspects of clinical genetics, as reflected in the numbers of workers in the speciality and attendance at conferences, as well as in the numbers of papers submitted for publication. The increasing interest in dysmorphic syndromes, in prenatal diagnosis, and in organisation of genetic services is again expressed in publications in these areas. The natural splitting tendency for new journals to evolve in each of these fields is balanced by their high degree of overlap and by the need for workers in medical genetics to keep abreast of developments in all of them. It is in this unifying role that Journal of Medical Genetics has a particular value, and the Journal will continue to aim for a balance of interests that represents the field of medical genetics as a whole, not just one section of it.

At a practical level, there are immediate benefits of monthly publication for both contributors and readers. Editing and reviewing time are already, thanks to the efficiency of the reviewing team, extremely rapid, but publication has often been delayed by the backlog inevitable with relatively infrequent publication. This year should see rapid publication extended from a relatively few 'priority' articles to the great majority. Monthly issues will also allow correspondence and editorial sections to be more topical and responsive, hopefully giving a greater sense of dialogue between the Journal and its readership. The current series of syndrome and gene mapping reviews will continue and develop, supplemented by regular conference reports, while later this year a new series of articles, 'Medical Genetics around the World', will cover the development of the field in a variety of different countries, emphasising the international nature of the Journal. The book review section will be broadened to include reviews of computer programmes.

Whatever the intentions of the editors, the future direction and success of any journal lies largely in the hands of its readers and its contributors; Journal of Medical Genetics is no exception to this. During the past year many people have given helpful suggestions on how the Journal can be improved and developed; these will be especially welcome during the coming year and should help to ensure that the changes occurring as the Journal goes monthly are those that its authors and readers really wish to see in print.

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