Looking towards the next millennium

The Postgraduate Medical Journal, with its distinctive red cover, has been familiar to many generations of doctors, not just in the UK, but throughout the world. For a number of them it has been a passport into the world of medical publishing and there can be few practising clinicians who have not submitted a paper to the journal at some time in their careers. Its support of clinical investigation has attracted interest from various quarters and ensured a steady readership over the years. The editorial board of the journal has had a long-term commitment to the continuing education of doctors and, from its founding, has fostered the principle that no one is too old or too experienced to learn. This at one time revolutionary concept has now gained general recognition in the world of medicine and indeed is now spreading to other professions, including the law.

Although the journal is an old friend, there has been an enthusiasm to further develop its educational role. Much of the ground work for these developments was laid by my predecessor, Dr Charles Hind. It is my intention and that of the editorial board to build on these strengths. During the coming years we will strengthen the journal’s educational activities with the introduction of assessment exercises linked to review articles. In parallel with this, original research will be brought to press more quickly and reviewers encouraged to identify articles which have direct relevance to day-to-day clinical practice and so have an impact on patient care. Clearly, the availability of on-line medical journals is both a challenge and opportunity that the Postgraduate Medical Journal must accept. We will also be working towards this goal during this period.

To achieve these ends, authors will be encouraged to identify who has overall responsibility for the contents and accuracy of articles. The editorial board has now appointed a statistical advisor to ensure the use of appropriate forms of analysis in original papers. Ultimately, I would like to encourage an open review process – but this is for the future. My current responsibilities as editor will be to ensure a smooth transition, a growing and satisfied readership, and a significant impact on patient care.

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