

## Editorial

A recurrent enquiry from intending authors is whether their work is likely to develop into a paper that we would like to publish in the *Archives*. Wise authors will have gauged the journal by looking through a number of recent issues. But we can give additional guidelines which are generated by the fact that we as editors have to be conscious always of satisfying our subscribers.

The *Archives* is the official, and only, journal of the British Paediatric Association. It is received by every member of the British Paediatric Association, including all consultant paediatricians and established trainees. In addition to these and the library subscribers in the UK, three-quarters of our readers are outside the UK with particularly high circulations in Western Europe, the 'Commonwealth', North America, and Japan.

We are an essentially clinical journal and hope that clinicians who read our journal will always find something that gives them a better understanding of a problem or enables them to manage a particular child better. That child may be a neonate in the special care baby unit, a toddler in the children's ward, or a schoolchild attending an outpatient clinic or surgery. We hope too that the reader will gain a greater understanding of psychosocial issues, health education, and medical education. Although we are a clinical journal we are proud to publish animal and basic science research papers that have likely future relevance to paediatric problems.

Annotations and reviews are commissioned by the editors but suggestions are always welcome.

Single case reports are difficult to get published in most journals. In some ways this is a pity because they provide a vehicle for first notification of syndromes and also for new information. The problem for editors is in deciding which of the many case reports submitted really are worthy. We tend to look for new associations (bearing in mind that there must be strong grounds for believing it to be an association of importance rather than a coincidence) or new aspects of management or diagnosis. Always, particularly good photographs will enhance the educational value of a case report. In general a case report is unlikely to be considered unless it fulfils the criteria for a Short Report as described inside the front cover. Similarly a trial based on a reasonable hypothesis which yielded negative results is probably best submitted as a very brief Short Report of less than 500 words. We know that negative results are difficult to get published and yet it is important that they appear in print if only to prevent others

embarking up that particular blind alley. Short Reports are more likely to achieve fast publication and should appear in print within 4 months of acceptance.

Our aim is for all original articles to appear within 6 months of acceptance. Authors want prompt publication for their papers but they should realise that some of the qualities of a good journal prevent immediate publication. Unless the paper is clearly unsuitable for publication the paper will be sent to at least one expert referee. That takes time. However, from the author's point of view there is a bonus in that the referee's comments are likely to be helpful in improving the paper if it is published, and if it cannot be published the referee's comments, which we send back with the paper, should help the authors with their work. Editing the paper and, if it needs it, further alteration also takes time. As typically English editors (and lamentable linguists) we continually admire the skill of overseas colleagues, whose first language is not English, in writing good articles in our language. Nevertheless the quality of those papers can be improved by the attention of our editorial staff to both language and presentation. We believe that such time is well spent, and the service appreciated by author and reader alike.

Authors themselves can do much to achieve prompt publication. For a start they should follow the guidelines that are printed inside the front cover of our journal before submitting their manuscripts. The absence of a summary, failure to prepare the references in the correct form, and other minor errors delay manuscripts. Authors should also realise that they have a much greater chance of a shorter paper getting accepted than a longer. Editors, trying to be fair to as many intending authors as possible, have to ensure that no paper is longer than its content deserves. Economy of style is an admirable habit.

1980 and 1981 were black years for the editors. A grotesquely large backlog of accepted papers was causing lengthy delay in publication. For a long time we had to accept very few papers and at times the rejection rate rose well above 80%. Papers which we would have been proud to publish were rejected; both new authors and much valued regular contributors were rebuffed. Those days are over: they will not be allowed to return. We are back in the business we enjoy of *accepting* papers, helping authors to publish their work, and creating an interesting journal for our readers. Normal service has been resumed—it will now be improved.