

# Moving forward in the new year

Kian-Keong Poh

In the new year, the *Singapore Medical Journal (SMJ)* will continue to strive to be the journal of choice for readers and authors in this region.

For readers, our monthly continuing medical education articles, such as the Practice Integration & Life-long Learning series, will continue to facilitate ongoing learning on topics that are relevant to local practice.<sup>(1)</sup> There will be more invited reviews that offer comprehensive narrative analysis of recent or evolving developments in medicine. Interesting original papers from overseas may be accompanied by insightful editorials that provide a local perspective on the topic. In addition, we will publish some themed issues that bring together articles from similar specialties, to give focused attention to topics that are of great interest.<sup>(2,3)</sup> The *SMJ* website has also been upgraded to be more mobile- and user-friendly. Articles can now be read on our *SMJ* website instead of as PDF files. This has made it easier for readers to access articles 'on-the-go' using their mobile devices and to search our archives.

For authors, we continue to recognise excellence in research through the *SMJ* Best Research Paper Awards, which are presented at the Singapore Medical Association Annual Dinner. All original research papers published in a given year are automatically considered for the awards. Each paper undergoes two rounds of judging: the first round by members of the editorial board, who shortlist the top ten papers that meet a stringent set of criteria, and the second round by three eminent professors, who use the same set of criteria to select the top three papers. Over the years, we have been heartened to consistently see high-quality papers being published in *SMJ*. We hope that both local and overseas authors will continue to submit quality papers to *SMJ*.

In addition, authors can look forward to shorter manuscript processing times. Since 2015, we have introduced electronic publication ahead of print. This important step has allowed research to be released earlier, especially since articles published ahead of print are simultaneously indexed in PubMed. These improvements are made possible by the hard work of editorial staff behind the scenes and timely reviews of papers by specialty editors and reviewers.

Reviewers play a core role in the 'blinded' peer-review process. At the *SMJ*, we usually assign two reviewers per paper, and send it for further peer review if the reviewer comments are discordant. Like examiners, some reviewers are stringent 'hawks', while others are lenient 'doves'. Some leave no comments, while others add notes on every error that they spot. However, most

reviewers are seasoned and provide valuable reviews according to the guidelines for reviewers on the *SMJ* website.<sup>(4)</sup> One of the challenges of running a journal is to consistently invite practitioners and experts in various fields to review our papers amid their many commitments. We are grateful to have many reviewers who respond by their designated deadlines. We recognise these reviewers annually (see page 34), but additional appreciation is given to those who are able to produce critical reviews in a timely manner.

It is important for reviewers never to breach the confidentiality required of them. Recently, the *Annals of Internal Medicine* reported a rare, unfortunate occurrence. A former peer reviewer admitted to taking a paper that was rejected from that journal and publishing it in another journal after changing the authors' names and titles. The paper was subsequently retracted with a swift response published by its Editor-in-Chief.<sup>(5)</sup> This incident – an extreme situation involving serious plagiarism – occurred even to a reputable journal like the *Annals*, which has a rigorous review process and is stringent in its choice of reviewers. Therefore, reviewers need to recognise their responsibility when they take on this role.

At the penultimate frontier in the article publication process are our crucial specialty editors, who discuss and make decisions on manuscripts after reviewers have submitted their comments. Based on our overview of the many papers that are submitted, priorities are assigned to articles. A paper that does not receive an unfavourable review may be rejected if it has lower priority. Overall, the *SMJ* accepts less than 40% of the papers submitted.

The number of academic journals has increased steadily over the years, presenting researchers with more choices. Ultimately, the onus is on the submitting authors to choose the most appropriate journal that will give them exposure to the audience they want. In the new year, we will continue to improve our processes to encourage authors and readers to make *SMJ* their journal of choice. Hopefully, we will see more submissions of high-quality, original research papers from local and overseas authors with the potential to change clinical practice.

## REFERENCES

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