



EDITORIAL: Streamlining the FastTrack

All editors of scientific journals and all authors wish to keep to a minimum the time between submission of a paper and its publication (or rejection). At the *Annals*, we have worked hard to reduce the time from acceptance to publication, and we now have some exciting developments planned that will lead to more efficient processing of submitted manuscripts.

The addition by my predecessor Irving Taylor of two extra issues per year greatly helped us bring down the time from acceptance to publication. In the last 9 months, I have maintained the pressure to accept only the best submitted papers, and we have revised the way accepted papers are handled by the Production Team. It now takes about 3 months from decision for an original article to appear in print. However, we make full use of our 'FastTrack' system which allows online publication (with a citable DOI) within 4 weeks of acceptance; all research papers now benefit from FastTrack. We have prioritised research papers for publication, while keeping the broad spread of article types; the space allocated for Technical Section, CORESS Feedback, News from NICE and Book Reviews will be carefully maintained. It is good to report that CORESS is extending beyond general surgery, and soon there will be feedback from other specialties.

Online publication is now part of the mainstream, even at the *Annals*. Case Reports are published online only, to take advantage of the possibility of colour illustrations and to reduce the restriction on numbers of figures. Important learning points and well-illustrated educational cases are welcome in this section. We have Readers' Pages, on the College website. This is now our preferred route for submission of comments and correspondence for publication. Contributions can be posted online, and may be selected for subsequent publication. Authors will be asked to respond through this route, enabling immediate discussion of any material published in the *Annals*.

The *Annals* will continue to publish online abstracts of presentations at surgical meetings. We accept abstracts from regional meetings in any surgical discipline, and this year we also publish abstracts from the Royal Society of Medicine Section of Surgery, and the ALPS meeting organised by the Association of Upper GI Surgeons. Meeting organisers who may wish to publish abstracts should contact the Editorial Office in the first instance.

This month sees a truly momentous innovation for the *Annals*. The way in which submitted manuscripts have been handled in the Office has not changed for many years, perhaps not since the very first issue. Electronic submissions by email are handled in the same way as paper submissions were previously, with the ever-present risk that files with no incoming traffic may be ignored for long periods. If a referee fails to respond, or an author does not receive an invitation to revise a paper, months may go by before the file is reviewed. This is going to change. We are about to begin a trial of our new electronic manuscript handling system. Selected authors and referees will be asked to help us in this trial (which will be backed up by the traditional system during the trial) so that we can ensure that the new system will work efficiently when we switch over completely to electronic management in the summer.

The advantages of change are clear: the editors will be able to see submitted papers immediately they are uploaded by the author, referees can be allocated and invited to review at the click of a button; importantly, inability or failure to review within 3 weeks can be flagged up to the Editor and a replacement identified; as soon as the Editor has sufficient guidance from referees, a decision can be made and communicated to the author. For authors, the service will be quicker and more reliable; for editors, the performance of referees can be monitored and selection of appropriate people for each paper will be improved; and for referees, communication will be improved by seeing the comments of others, and the Editor's decision. Referees will be able to enter or modify index terms for their own area of interest. We aim to make the system painless: a request to review will be accompanied by a link to the submitted file and the report page, but each user can set up their own password protected login to access their *Annals* activity at any time.

If the occasion arises for you, as author or as referee, please accept our invitation to take part in our trial of the new manuscript handling system. In this way, you will contribute to a better service for all our readers. When the new system is fully functional in a few months' time, we shall be able to claim that we have streamlined the whole process from submission to first decision, and on to publication.

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