Editorial

Inaugural Editorial
A New Era for Circulation Research

Eduardo Marbán

It is my pleasure to address you as the new Editor of Circulation Research. The journal is thriving as I inherit it from Steve Vatner’s dedicated and capable direction. Submissions are roughly double what they were when he took over (totaling nearly 1300 in 1998), and the journal’s short-term ISI impact factor has risen to 8.44.1 This is particularly remarkable given that Circulation Research does not traditionally publish meeting abstracts, which artificially inflate the short-term impact factor. Most abstracts are cited only in the first 2 years after publication, which is the period covered by the conventional short-term impact factor. A more telling indicator of a journal’s preeminence in the field is its rank in 15-year impact factor ratings. In this long-term measure of scientific impact, Circulation Research’s rating of 64.4 ranks number one among cardiovascular journals (and 15th among all scientific journals), well above the 26th-place 53.8 rating of its closest competitor.2

Here, I would like to preview some of the changes that will occur in the journal. These changes are designed to maintain excellence while improving the efficiency of the review process and taking advantage of new technology. For operational details of these and other journal policies, please refer to the revised Instructions to Authors that appear elsewhere in this issue.

Editorial Scope

Circulation Research is the very best forum for fundamental research of relevance to the cardiovascular system. The journal will continue to publish outstanding work on basic cardiac and vascular biology while particularly encouraging the submission of work that uses state-of-the-art approaches to illuminate mechanisms of human disease (ie, translational research). A welcome is also extended to cutting-edge clinical research (and taking advantage of new technology). For operational details of these and other journal policies, please refer to the revised Instructions to Authors that appear elsewhere in this issue.

Triage Policy

Most other journals of comparable stature have instituted a triage system to reject a high fraction of submitted manuscripts. At Circulation Research, we will continue to resist this trend by recruiting two or three reviewers to help in the evaluation of the vast majority of submissions. The feedback that authors receive from qualified reviewers is an important part of the scientific process, even when the ultimate decision is not to publish. Nevertheless, the editors reserve the option of rejecting manuscripts that they consider to be clearly noncompetitive (eg, duplication of previous work or case reports) without a full formal review. Such rejection without full review will be used most frequently for the new Ultra-Rapid Communications category (described in full below), which is designed for work of unusually high priority. Likewise, manuscripts that are judged by external referees to be noncompetitive may not receive detailed reviews.

Associate Editors

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The new editorial team (pictured in the Figure) includes many scientists who are also practicing clinicians (in adult and pediatric cardiology, human genetics, and clinical pharmacology). Each manuscript will be handled primarily by one of the Associate Editors or by the Editor in Chief. The assignment of this responsibility will be based on expertise rather than geography; as an example, manuscripts submitted from Japan may be assigned to an editor in the United States, Canada, Europe, or even in Japan, depending on the subject area. Suggestions from authors for editorial assignments are welcome.

Editor in Chief

Eduardo Marbán, MD, PhD

Areas of Expertise

Ion channels, calcium cycling, gene transfer, heart failure, energy metabolism

From the Editor in Chief, Circulation Research.
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Circulation Research is available at http://www.circresaha.org
Challenges and Opportunities

I am assuming the editorship at an exciting but challenging time in the history of scientific publishing. The Internet has revolutionized the way we process information. These changes are readily apparent in the way we now routinely prepare manuscripts or grants for submission. Many of us simply sit down and write a first draft, relying on a general knowledge of the relevant literature. Once we are satisfied with the overall structure, we scan the manuscript and begin an iterative process of checks for accuracy and insertion of relevant citations. We do so aided by one of several programs that enable seamless transitions from our text to citation databases, on our desktops or on the Internet. We can search for articles by topics, by authors, or by key words; the abstracts appear in an instant, and the prejudices of our memories are either reinforced or refuted. With another click, we can often retrieve the full text of relevant articles. No longer do we have to prepare piles of articles in advance of writing. One of my colleagues has even gone so far as to refurbish his office in a minimalist style, having decided to do without paper files altogether. Why keep reprint files when the information is all available at the click of a mouse? The immediacy of Internet access, along with its democracy, continues to fuel the move toward online publication. Indeed, one might argue (and several have) that the very institution of scientific journals should be abolished. Why not just post articles in an online repository and let readers judge for themselves whether or not the conclusions are valid?

It is the view of the new Circulation Research editorial team that, now more than ever, science needs reliable mechanisms for assessing quality, for separating the wheat from the chaff. As scientists, we value veracity above all else. Our fundamental skepticism makes us look twice at raw data and even harder at processed data and conjectural interpretations. The tried-and-true approach of the voluntary submission of manuscripts, followed by rigorous peer review and publication in recognized journals, has heralded the most momentous discoveries of the twentieth century. In the current era of information glut, we have to know what is worthy of our limited time, what truly merits our attention. The substantial combined efforts of the authors, reviewers, and editors make the strongest case for the work, highlighting its value and enhancing its clarity. The imprimatur of acceptance in a given journal is no guarantee that the work is correct, but it does tell its readers that the work merits detailed scientific scrutiny. This is a function that Circulation Research will strive to fulfill for the cardiovascular sciences well into the next millennium.

Given these considerations, it is also fair to wonder whether we need hard copies at all any more. The problem is that, although most of us value the convenience of Internet access, we also appreciate the immediacy, the feel, even the esthetics, of the hard copy. We want one without having to give up the other. Photons are all it takes to transmit the information from the hard copy into one’s consciousness. Until hand-held digital readers become as friendly as reprints or personal copies of our favorite journals, we will want to preserve the best of hard-copy publishing while taking full advantage of new electronic opportunities.

New Initiatives

Circulation Research will move to incorporate the best of online publishing while maintaining a first-rate, hard-copy format. The following initiatives will begin immediately:

First, the information content of the printed pages will be maximized by having detailed methods and numerical appendices appear online only. The print version will contain a condensed Materials and Methods section (ideally no more than two paragraphs). Information that is present in previous publications should be cited rather than repeated. To offset this limitation, expanded Materials and Methods and relevant supporting materials will be posted online as supplementary information. Both the manuscript itself and any supplementary information will have to be submitted initially and will undergo peer review. The Table of Contents and the abstract will highlight articles that contain online supplementary information, listing the URL where such information can be accessed. Exceptions to the condensed Materials and Methods format will be granted if the authors can make a convincing case that the development and use of novel methodologies are central to the main point of the paper. Nature, Science, and several other journals already post supplementary information of this sort online only. Implementation of this simple measure will cut the length of the average published article by one to two print pages, enabling the inclusion of one more article per published issue without increasing the overall number of printed pages.

Second, we have inaugurated an UltraRapid Communications format; indeed, the first UltraRapid Communication appears in this issue. Such manuscripts will be guaranteed a first decision within 21 days of receipt at the editorial office and, once accepted, will appear in the next available online issue. The full publication will appear online, with just the abstract printed in the hard-copy version. Nevertheless, such articles will receive complete citations and will be listed in indexing services such as MEDLINE, as are regular papers. UltraRapid Communications will look just like regular papers (they will undergo the same composition/copyediting processes), and printed reprints will be available for purchase at the usual fee. The appeal of this format is its potential for rapid publication (articles may appear within 6 weeks of submission), with the guarantee of expedited processing. The UltraRapid Communications format is designed to attract work of unusually high priority, with a view to speedy review and publication. Accordingly, manuscripts submitted as UltraRapid Communications will be scrutinized closely at the editorial level and may be rejected without external review. In such cases, the authors will be notified promptly and given the option of having the manuscript reprocessed for consideration as an Original Contribution (or as a Brief Communication if it conforms to the length limits for that category). Manuscripts not accepted as UltraRapid Communications may be resubmitted for consideration as Original Contributions after suitable revision. Conversely, the editors may occasionally offer to publish manuscripts submitted in other categories as UltraRapid Communications.

Third, we welcome creative suggestions from you to help us to develop the online version in a variety of other ways. One obvious potential application would be to include video clips (eg, for
echocardiograms) or stereoscopic displays (eg, for images of molecular structure) as appendixes to appropriate articles.

Fourth, *Circulation Research* will publish more MiniReviews and Editorials while doing away with the full-length Review format. MiniReviews will generally be commissioned, but unsolicited submissions are welcome. In such cases, the submitting authors are advised to have their ideas prescreened by the editors, to ensure interest and to avoid duplication with already-commissioned manuscripts. Selected MiniReviews will appear in thematic clusters under the aegis of a Guest Editor. All MiniReviews and Editorials will undergo peer review, with no guarantee of acceptance.

Finally, we are working diligently to automate the processing of manuscripts and, in particular, to reduce the amount of paper that is shuttled about in the submission and review process. The new editorial office is working with the publisher toward implementation of online manuscript submission, a goal that should be realizable within 12 months. In the meantime, we ask that all submissions be accompanied by a diskette that contains the full manuscript, as described in the Instructions to Authors. Having a diskette will enable us to log in new manuscripts with a minimum of keystrokes, as well as enabling file sharing among office staff and the editorial team. Reviewers who prefer to receive manuscripts digitally will be able to do so. In addition, we will use e-mail preferentially in our communications with referees and authors. All these initiatives are designed to improve the efficiency of the editorial process.

References


Key Words: Internet ■ scientific publishing ■ online only ■ peer review
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