Word about a good medical journal

Andrzej Nestorowicz

1st Department of Anaesthesiology and Intensive Therapy, Medical University of Lublin

The year 2012 is another, 44th year of publishing “Anaesthesiology Intensive Therapy” — the Official Journal of the Polish Society of Anaesthesiology and Intensive Therapy. Four decades of its presence in the world of scientific publications is the period far from a record, yet long enough for our quarterly to gain its due stateliness. For so many years, the quarterly has been available for a wide circle of readers, not only anaesthesiologists [1].

The journal’s standing is mainly reflected in the articles published in it, thus the authors are the ones who decide about its assets. The authors are the only and real guarantors of past and future successes of the periodical. Amongst thousands of articles published in “Anaesthesiology Intensive Therapy”, many original papers fulfilled the international criteria, confirming the great creative potential of Polish researchers. Moreover, case reports describing rare or difficult clinical cases are noteworthy, as their practical value cannot be overestimated. In recent years, reviews have become of lesser importance; indispensable in the past when availability of source materials was limited, they lose their educative merit due to growing popularity of other media. For the same reasons, the quarterly no longer publishes abstracts of articles from other medical periodicals, which were popular in the past. Furthermore, no reports of chronicle-like or informational nature are provided, which results from successive transformation of the quarterly from the circle-based to par excellence scientific journal, meeting the criteria of the opinion-giving institutions.

The current requirements for scientific journals arouse however numerous controversies. According to the national criteria of parametric evaluation [2], changed every few years, the journals, which publish their articles in English rather than Polish, cooperate mainly with foreign reviewers and whose texts are verified by specialists for whom Polish is not their mother tongue, are preferable. On the other hand, the journal is considered scientific if one scientific article, I mean one, is published in each issue. Unfortunately, the motives of the authors of such criteria are unknown. The most heated debates concern, however, the way the scientific publications are assessed internationally [3, 4].

The leading institution carrying out such assessments is Thompson Reuters (vide “Philadelphia list”). For many years, the corporation has recognised the American journals as the best ones published.

The key measure of the quality of publications and prestige of journals is the citation rate. Although meeting the criteria of objectivity, the rate is not ideal as it is based on publications published in English, does not include all bibliographic databases, and does not differentiate between the basic sciences and clinical articles. In some cases, the reason for lack of recognition for the journal is “… sufficient coverage of these subject areas… for journals from your geographic region”.

In the light of increasingly high importance of the citation rate, it should be regretfully stated that many authors of the papers submitted for publication in “Anaesthesiology Intensive Therapy” base their reports exclusively on foreign publications, not infrequently of dubious value, and ignore Polish papers published in our quarterly, often of better quality, which hardly helps in attempts to gain the international recognition.

Irrespective of structural weaknesses of various international systems of parametric assessment of scientific journals, it is worth to compare our periodical with similar ones published worldwide. The successes, if any, are primarily attributable to the authors of papers, as mentioned earlier, and to editorial boards or publishers, although to a lesser degree.

Editing the medical journal is a special public activity, full of pitfalls and intricacies. Each text to be published is first dealt with by the team of people responsible for its proper factual and linguistic form, appropriate graphic design and aesthetics. For physicians-clinicians, this is an extraordinary task and, as evidenced by the past, not everyone can manage it. The ability to find a compromise between the way the authors present their achievements and the journal’s rules for publication is extremely useful. The limits of this compromise are outlined by the guidelines for authors, amongst them the obligatory verification of results using suitably chosen and accurately carried out statistical analy-
ses is worth emphasising. Verification-related negligence is commonly considered unprofessional [5]. The journal value is also determined by the appropriate style and language of publications, logical rigorism of the content, grammatical correctness and punctuation. Moreover, the specificity of scientific texts does not mean the consent to jargon expressions, neologisms, undefined notions or symbols [6]. The authors should avoid lapsus linguæ (for instance — “due to its toxic effects on parenchymal organs, alcohol has less and less supporters” [7]); however, it is not always the case in the creative fervour, which legitimises the reviewers of manuscripts and editors of journals.

In 2011, 185 authors published their papers in “Anaesthesiology Intensive Therapy” and the number of reports in recent years was 49/year on average. Today the journal is issued in two language versions: Polish and English and is available in paper and electronic forms.

Although the world without traditionally issued journals is hard to imagine, the popularity of their electronic versions is a fact, which cannot be overestimated. The Internet provides quick and easy access to scientific papers (unless based on commercial rules [8, 9], which unfortunately happens increasingly often) and is an infinite treasury of information and source of scientific inspirations. It is the generator of advances in medicine, whose strength of impact is unusual [10]. Any journal without a website is a niche publication, lacking perspectives for reaching wider circle of readers. Noteworthy, since the electronic version of “Anaesthesiology Intensive Therapy” has been made available, the number of readers has been continuously increasing; http://anestezjologia.net has been used by almost 7 thousand readers a month.

Thanks to the presence of the quarterly in the most popular database of medical journals, i.e. PubMed, the articles published there are known worldwide. Numerous examples indicate that Polish papers in English are not only read but also cited in other journals [11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16 17, 18] and textbooks [19, 20].

The necessary involvement of the team of devoted and closely cooperating people in editing „Anaesthesiology Intensive Therapy”, as mentioned earlier, requires also the suitable formal setting. Therefore, proper cooperation and support of the editorial team by the Main Board of the Polish Society of Anaesthesiology and Intensive Therapy is crucial for future development of the journal. Additionally, the quarterly would not gain the due position without its editor, who should understand the specificity of scientific journals. Unfortunately, in our commercialized world, the editors find it more and more difficult to show such an understanding. For these reasons, the editor of “Anaesthesiology Intensive Therapy” was changed, and starting with the present issue, we have a new editor-in-chief. I am deeply convinced that Dr Radosław Owczuk, associate professor, with his team of co-workers will spare no efforts to continue the development of our journal and will make “Anaesthesiology Intensive Therapy” the leading world-famous medical periodical. I cordially wish him success.

References:

Corresponding author:
Prof. Andrzej Nestorowicz, MD, PhD
Department of Anaesthesiology and Intensive Therapy,
Medical University of Lublin
ul. Jazewskiego 8, 20–950 Lublin
tel.: (81) 724 43 32, fax: (81) 724 45 50

Anaesthesiol Intensive Ther 2012, issue 44, no 3, 115–116