‘Who Needs a New Journal?’

Discovering this latest addition to the already diverse array of gynecological journals may very well prompt the compulsive consumer of professional literary offerings to sigh, asking ‘who needs it?’ – and move up to a larger size waste basket. It is estimated that a new medical article is published every 26 seconds in the world literature. This would mean that in every 24-hour-period an additional 3,323 articles go into print. Fortunately only a portion of these articles relate to obstetrics and gynecology. Nevertheless a significant number of publications dealing with data of interest to the obstetrician are currently available, and this editor admits, along with many of his colleagues, that this hope of perusing and assimilating the material is usually greater than actual accomplishment. Furthermore, an admittedly cynical attempt to prove that (paraphrasing the New York Times) not all the news fit to print is news, revealed some rather amusing facts. During the past 5 years there have been at least 78 published articles on Clomid, 542 on pregnancy tests, 543 on estriol and 1,228 on oral contraceptives. During the first 3 months of this year, 96 articles on oral contraceptives have already been published.

These facts alone perhaps would have discouraged us from the ambitious plan of remodeling Gynaecologia, the Methuselah (1895) of gynecological literature with its modest circulation, into a first-rate gynecological journal. Some searching and introspection are required to justify this undertaking. With all due respect for the clinical practice of our specialty and the usefulness of statistical clinical studies, case reports, applied pharmacology etc., we must recognize, along with other specialties, that experimentation in the basic sciences provides the key to progress. At the risk of being redundant, let me say that investigative aspects of medical science cannot be accepted as being ‘way over the head’ of practicing physicians and particularly not for physicians in residency training. But such an objective requires a recognizable forum for dissemination, for discussion and for criticism.

No such forum identified with Ob-Gyn is available at this time. Our scientists tend to publish the results of their better efforts in sub-specialty journals, inviting the challenge of highly discriminating sophisticated and rigorous editorial reviews, all for good reason: far more academic credit is given by peers, prestigious societies, and promotion committees for a paper published in the Journal of Clinical Investigation than one appearing in our more clinically oriented periodicals. Having had some papers accepted and others turned down by a variety of editorial boards, I can assure the uninitiated that there is a significant difference, with some of the following consequences: scientifically speaking, obstetricians and gynecologists are seldom recognized on equal footing with colleagues of some other clinical specialties; our residents too often shy away from reading anything that does not have the ‘practical’ appeal; gynecologists loyally restricting their reading time to ‘their’ journals are not aware of the contributions of their most distinguished colleagues. Surely there is the throw-away, the condensed, simplified, in-plain-language communication for those who prefer a medical Readers’ Digest instead of digesting and evaluating an original paper. Such ‘shorties’ merely allow one to remember the name of the author and his conclusions. Whether such conclusions will hold water under the
rigorous scrutiny of editorial review in the strict scientific tradition, or better, whether the data and analysis will meet your own criteria of validity, cannot be evaluated. There is still another story. Curriculum revision in many schools has left Ob-Gyn largely as elective material. The interpretation of ‘Core’ material (obstetrics for non-obstetricians) has reduced the educative process to one not too far removed of one befitting a trade school. Here, too, identity of the specialty as a predominately scientific discipline is needed.

By the way, who in your school knows about the Society of Gynecologic Investigation? And where is there a uniform source of material for study for the resident preparing himself for the in-service examinations now being contemplated or for a better, more logical preparation for the Boards?

“Who Needs a New Journal”

For an answer to the foregoing, admittedly with a fair dose of optimism – here is the proposition for the Journal of Gynecologic Investigation: scientific reports in reproductive biology, and related sciences. To be published in English only, we nevertheless plan for it to be an international journal, with an editorial board providing a true peer review and criticism, acceptance, or rejection of submitted material, to be determined by at least two referees and one of the editors.

Finally for those who after all this still object to a new journal: in the spirit of the general concern with the population increase, before starting this one, we have buried another. We have only replaced ourselves.

Walter L. Herrmann W. LeRoy Heinrichs