‘Gray Science’

In contrast to many other professionals – perhaps with the exception of artists who are able to pursue their passion until the end of life – scientists are a privileged breed. If our physical and mental capacities allow, we may continue our work also after retirement, provided we are able to acquire sufficient grant support to cover the costs for personnel, supplies, travel, etc. However, most academic institutions outside the USA with their clear-cut rules for the continuation of research by scientists after the official retirement age are reluctant to foster programs that aim at offering appropriate working conditions to elderly scientists, with very few exceptions [1]. This is, of course, short sighted from many different viewpoints:

(a) Older scientists are highly experienced and usually have a good oversight in a given field from which young collaborators may benefit.

(b) The fact that they decide to go on with their research proves their enthusiasm that will also sparkle the minds of young students and postdocs.

(c) They do not block careers of young researchers any more.

(d) Except for the elderly unpaid group leader herself, the argument that she/he occupies laboratory space that could be used by younger scientists does not really hold, since all other group members are usually young postdocs and graduate students, respectively.

(e) They have established widespread local, national and international networks that may also be helpful for young members of the group.

(f) Good mentoring is still – perhaps even more successfully – possible for older scientists.

(g) They are familiar with methods and models, e.g. certain techniques of animal experimentation that cannot be retrieved easily from other sources. This is often an asset when mixed with the mastering of the most modern methods by young collaborators [2].

(h) For the academic base institution the decision if older scientists should be allowed to continue their work is easy and straightforward: as long as they are able to raise sufficient grant support, their projects are obviously competitive, i.e. equal or even surpass the quality and originality of other projects filed by younger applicants.

This last issue is, however, problematic for several reasons. First, grant review committees always give credit to the track record of an applicant, and scientists at the beginning of their careers – when they need support most urgently – are intrinsically handicapped in this respect.

First, older scientists usually have a higher Hirsh factor (H-factor, see <http://portal.isiknowledge.com>) reflecting the cumulative lifelong scientific achievement. This is even more critical and unjust considering the fact that many academic institutions now rely heavily on the H-factor when recruiting new faculty.

Second, in times of financial belt tightening, this problem is even more serious, since a higher number of experienced applicants will scoop the largest share of the little money that is left.

Third, analyzing the age distribution of recipients of e.g. NIH grants, it becomes obvious that the impact of this parameter is becoming more significant, i.e. that younger investigators have an increasingly lower chance to get funded (‘Graying of Science’) [3]. Too often this entails the retraction of young promising but frustrated applicants from research.

There are two possibilities to deal with this situation to the benefit of both, i.e. the young and the old. The optimal – but at present unrealistic – strategy would, of course, be to increase the budget of the funding organizations. A more realistic approach would be to ‘educate’ review panel members to really assess the scientific value of a given project, trying to give less weight to the scientific track record of the applicant and take the risk to award

grants to young eager beavers if the project fulfills the criteria of excellence. Incidentally, the same rules apply to journal editors!

This brings me to the second part of this year's Editorial, looking at the immediate past and future of *Gerontology*. 2011 was a good year for the journal, reflected by a significant – albeit for me not yet sufficient – increase of the Impact Factor. The ever increasing number of submitted original manuscripts required an even more strict publishing policy, and *Gerontology* at present has an acceptance rate of only about 15%. As far as Mini-Reviews and Viewpoint articles are concerned, the feedback from our audience was very positive, especially since there is always something interesting contained in all sections of the journal. We also have significantly shortened the manuscript processing time, but there is, of course, still some room left for further improvement. Obviously, tapping the expertise and time of voluntary reviewers becomes ever more difficult (and time-consuming) in these busy and competitive times.

Although most of the incoming manuscripts are submitted to one of the three 'old' sections (Experimental, Clinical, Behavioural), a number of interesting papers were also published in the Regenerative and Technological Section. Obviously, gerontologists dealing with technical aspects of our discipline have come to realize the advantage of presenting their work to the real stakeholders rather than only to their own community.

One of the highlights during the past year certainly was the publication of two Special Section Issues in the Behavioural Science section, viz. *'Dyadic Interrelations in Lifespan Development and Aging: How Does 1 + 1 Make a Couple?'*, edited by Mary Luszcz, published in issue 57/2/11, and *'Promoting Late-Life Mobility and Independence'*, edited by Mike Martin, published in issue 57/3/11.

The collaboration with our publishing house, Karger, was as friendly, efficient and smooth as ever and I would

like to take the opportunity to thank Thomas Nold as our representative at Karger, and Christine Süss, our Editorial Assistant, for their professional input. I would also like to thank the Section Editors, especially Günter Lepperdinger, who steps in when I am absent from our base, as well as the Members of the Editorial Board for their donation of time and expertise.

Finally, at the end of 2011, the term of several Editorial Board Members expired and I wholeheartedly thank them for their support during the past years. I am also looking forward to work with the following new members:

H.M. Brown-Borg, PhD, Grand Forks/N. Dak., USA
J.D. Erusalimsky, PhD, Cardiff, UK
L. Fontana, MD, PhD, St. Louis/Mo., USA
U. Granacher, PhD, Jena, Germany
C.A. Hoppmann, PhD, Vancouver, B.C. Canada
K.-S. Kang, DVM, PhD, Seoul, Korea
R.B. Knapp, PhD, Belfast, UK
G. Krömer, MD, PhD, PU-PH, Villejuif, France
B. Najafi, PhD, North Chicago/Ill., USA
J. Nikolich Zugich, MD, PhD, Tucson/Ariz., USA
J. Tao, MD, PhD, Guangzhou, China
N. Tavernarakis, PhD, Heraklion, Greece
D.C. Willcox, PhD, Ginowan, Japan

Their input will further strengthen the unique concept of *Gerontology*, i.e. covering a very broad scope of gerontological research.

G. Wick, Innsbruck

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- 2 Clarke M: Older scientists publish more papers. *Nature* 2008;455:1161.
- 3 Kaiser J: The graying of NIH research. *Science* 2008;322:848–849.