

## Hello, goodbye

Andrew R. Marks

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### Editorial

Much has changed in the 5 years since the responsibility for editing the *JCI* was transferred to Columbia University. Wars and a hurricane have conspired with other factors to overwhelm the national treasury. Support for investigator-initiated research at the NIH is now at a level that jeopardizes the nation's ability to adequately train future scientists to maintain the country's leadership in biomedical research. Indeed, there is insufficient support for even the best and brightest biomedical scientists to pursue the frontiers of the sciences at a time of unprecedented opportunities. Human embryonic stem cell research is still being suppressed in the United States. Economic models that enable academic health centers to flourish in the face of increasing challenges and the rising costs of health care have for the most part remained elusive. Translational research has become the buzzword, but there is widespread confusion and disagreement about how to do it. Despite all of these and other challenges to the biomedical research enterprise, the *JCI* remains vibrant, with record numbers of submissions and a loyal and enthusiastic readership.

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For that I am grateful, as I have been for the opportunity to serve the research community as editor in chief of the *JCI*. The *JCI* is the oldest continuously published biomedical research journal in the US and an important institution that needs to be nurtured and supported. When the Columbia University editors took over in 2002, online publishing, PubMed, and the Public Library of Science (PloS) journals were perceived as threatening the very economic survival of the journal. I am proud to say that the *JCI* has weathered every storm. The journal is financially sound, with the highest impact factor in its history (15.053), and continues to serve an important and unique role in biomedical publishing as the only open-access, general-interest journal edited largely by full-time active scientists. Indeed, the *JCI/ASCI* made a policy decision early on (in 1996) to provide entirely free and immediate access to 100% of the *JCI* content online. We have maintained this commitment despite ongoing financial challenges.

Two new series that we initiated, *Science in medicine* and *Science and society*, have been popular, and many of the articles in these series will be published this summer in the first-ever *JCI textbook of molecular medicine*. The goal of the *Science in medicine* series has been to illustrate the impact of modern biology on the current practice of medicine. It is our hope that the *Science in medicine* series will be particularly useful to those engaging in teaching rounds in academic health centers. The *Science and society* series aims to take advantage of the *JCI*'s role as the organ of the physician-scientist by addressing societal issues that influence

the practice of biomedical research, such as federal policies on funding of research, strategies for science education, societal approaches to stem cells, genetic counseling, and others.

The good moments have far outweighed the bad. The bad moments were the rare cases of fraud that had to be dealt with, the even rarer cases where distraught authors were unreasonable, and the necessity of rejecting more articles than we accepted (there is no joy in rejecting a paper!).

Humor and humility have not been absent at the *JCI* for the past five years. Some of the more memorable comments from authors and reviewers include the following:

Most humorous confidential comments: "I have recently suffered a fairly severe concussion and it is possible that I may not be the appropriate reviewer for this or any manuscript at this point in time . . . However, I seem to be functioning fairly well with most other grants and manuscripts. But this one . . . has me completely befuddled. If the other reviewers are more positive, feel free to toss this. But from my point of view, it is the manuscript that should be tossed."

Angriest response to a rejection letter: "Dear Dr. Savla, I cannot think of a less fair and illogical review process . . . I have and I will continue to discuss this review of which I have kept the full documentation with anybody willing to listen as an example of the arrogance of the Editorial Board of established journals and the need to re-fresh the water through the now open-access system. So far, nobody, reviewing the actual fact could come up with a logical explanation for the way the manu-

script was handled and the most generous interpretation is that whoever was involved in the editorial decision was an amateur unfamiliar with scientific matters. You can rest assured that I will not consider *JCI* for future manuscripts from my group as long as incompetent individuals will continue to run *JCI* and I will discourage anybody from subjecting themselves to the harassment we had to suffer."

Honorable mention: "I cannot but be amazed at the level of intellectual corruption that permeates the editorial decisions of elitist academics. In the face of the clear solution to AIDS and other viral epidemics killing millions you choose to suppress the publication of important data over several thousand other odd manuscripts most of which will not even be read by more than a dozen people. Luckily for the benefit of mankind science will out and you are on the record."

My personal favorite was when I contributed a review (I was reviewer D), and the authors responded that, confidentially, they had no problems with the comments of reviewers A, B and C, but they couldn't believe what an idiot reviewer D was!

The good moments have occurred on a weekly basis when the editors meet to discuss the best papers and we hear fantastic science and learn from each other. I do believe that my own science has benefited from exposure to so much good research over the past five years. I have initiated productive collaborations after becoming acquainted with the research of scientists in related and unrelated fields. I have incorporated novel techniques into my own work that I learned about from reading papers in the *JCI* that I might not have found time for had I not been an editor.

We have been able to address important societal issues related to scientific research in the *JCI* and to initiate and support discussions in the research community. Perhaps no topic has generated more dialogue than the series of editorials and responses concerning the current policies and problems at the NIH. The NIH matter placed the *JCI* front and center in the conversation about one of the most important challenges facing the biomedical research community today: how to work with the NIH to generate and maintain appropriate resources to support the best research.



The dialogue was vigorous and, it is hoped, useful and clearly demonstrates that the *JCI* can play a leadership role both in communicating science and in supporting the research community.

We also have taken pride in addressing other editorial issues, including the fight against teaching intelligent design in science classrooms and the damaging efforts by Tom Cruise to persuade others to abandon medical science. Our editorial pages have also championed the causes of improving diversity in academic health centers, providing support to physician-scientists, and applying basic science at health centers and have proposed reengineering the economics of medical schools. We proudly celebrated the *JCI*'s 80th birthday in 2004 with a wonderful special edition featuring contributions from most past editors in chief of the journal. We made great strides in reaching out to the lay press to get more coverage of biomedical research — Jay Leno even mentioned one article during a *Tonight show* monologue. A big effort was made to improve the covers and the illustrations that accompany the front matter in the *JCI*, resulting in some of the most useful biomedical research figures available.

I would be remiss if I failed to explicitly acknowledge the many talented individuals whose daily contributions are responsible for the high quality of the *JCI*. My coeditors from Columbia University (and one from NYU!) have been tireless in their devotion to excellence, and we have taught each other a lot over five years. I, for one, will miss our weekly editorial board meetings. All of us are deeply indebted to the consulting editors and other reviewers whose expertise and selfless devotion to peer review is essential for the journal to succeed. Our full-time professional editors, Ushma Savla Neill, Brooke Grindlinger, and Karen Honey have added stability and

a consistent level of quality that is reflected in every aspect of the *JCI*. The future of the journal is in excellent hands, as this powerful team will stay on with the journal when it transitions to its new home at the University of Pennsylvania. The publishing staff in Ann Arbor, headed by John Hawley and Karen Kosht, maintain the highest standards in the industry and are an energetic and talented group with whom it has been a pleasure to work. The *JCI* would be nothing without these wonderfully devoted and talented individuals.

Looking forward, I wish all the best to our successors, led by Larry Turka at Penn. The *JCI* is a public trust, and it is a great honor and responsibility to edit the journal. These are challenging times for science publishing, as the impact of online publishing and the changing economic models require flexibility and make it impossible to predict the future. Will there still be print journals? How will journals be supported? Will the lack of adequate NIH funding damage the biomedical research community for generations to come by driving away young scientists? Will this reduce the need for scientific journals? All these and many more questions that we cannot conceive of will occupy the next editorial board as it strives, as we have, to identify the very best and most important science to publish in the *JCI*.

It is a strength of the journal that the editors change every five years. I do not know in what directions the Penn editors will take the journal. Of one thing I am confident, because I know many of them: they will have similar standards for what constitutes a *JCI* article. At the outset I told my coeditors that the criteria for publishing in the *JCI* is that after reading a paper one says, "Wow — I didn't know that!" There are many more good papers submitted to the *JCI* than we can publish, so there is an element of subjectivity in choosing the ones

we do finally publish; as this issue of the *JCI* goes to press, I see that the Columbia editors have handled over 15,000 research articles, 3,100 revisions, and 400 rebuttals. The tastes will differ when the new editors take over, and that is a good thing, ensuring that a particular perspective cannot dominate the journal for many years. The only advice I have to offer is: Make sure to keep your sense of humor, enjoy yourselves, and never take yourselves too seriously. A former *JCI* editor told me when I took over that he did a survey showing that 95% of the papers submitted to the *JCI* ended up being published somewhere. This is reassuring, because it means that when we reject a paper, we are not preventing the dissemination of knowledge but simply influencing the mode of dissemination.

There are two questions that I've been asked frequently: (a) How much time does the *JCI* editorship take; and, more recently, (b) What are you going to do with all the free time you will have when the journal moves to Penn? The answer to the first question is: I don't know. It is natural for a scientist to read papers, so where does one draw the line between reading a *JCI* manuscript and the general reading that we all do to stay current in our knowledge? I would estimate that I spend 20% of my time reading papers. These days, most of those are *JCI* papers. As to the second question, there is never enough time to spend in the laboratory, so I am sure I will not be looking for things to do, and I can't resist noting that I certainly will have more time to read novels, write poetry, and watch movies, including one of my favorites, *The big Lebowski*.

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Editor in Chief

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