Human, all too human

C Niek van Dijk

Somebody brave once asked the Duke of Edinburgh why he’d married the Queen of England. His reply was enigmatic, “because she was there...”, but it suggested much. He might have said, “She’s the world’s most desirable bride, and her husband will inherit a thousand years of tradition and prestige (not to mention the wealth).” He might have said, “Well, somebody had to, and I was a Prince, so I could...” And he could have added, “it’s a damn difficult job, but it needs doing, and doing well.” All of these apply, and more.

This is our Journal’s first birthday, so it’s fitting to ask ourselves the same type of questions. Why read another orthopaedic sports medicine journal when the field is already crowded? What can we add that the others have missed and how can we establish ourselves? After all, every journal has its own ‘mission statement’ and scope, and they all read much the same. I doubt that many would notice if they all got muddled up and substituted one for another.

The Duke of Edinburgh might have said, “Well, every successful association needs a journal, just as every man needs a well-fitting suit, and every Queen needs someone like me.” That is, no society can be complete without its journal, and ISAKOS is a truly global society—its members may cluster in North America and Europe and Asia, but really they’re scattered all across the world and there’s never been a truly global journal. But now there is, and it’s called JISAKOS. And that, dear readers, is the simple answer.

There is the second question: what can our Journal do that the others have not already accomplished? And how can we establish ourselves, against all the other journals in this field? After all, there are only so many good articles, and all the journals are competing for these articles in hopes of maintaining or increasing their ‘impact’.

We have several advantages of being ‘the new kid on the block’. We are the first ‘digitally born’ orthopaedic sports medicine journal, designed for a faster moving world, where immediate access is the norm. Other journals have had to adapt to this new world, often with reluctance. But we were born into it. We are mobile friendly. Our articles publish online as soon as they are final. And, the Journal has all the sophistication of the media-savvy younger generation. Of course, we still provide paper-printed copies, which ISAKOS members can bind with rich leather, and gaze at lovingly during their retirement. We started fast moving and will continue at this pace.

We have also instituted some unique editorial approaches that are helping to establish the journal. We’ve had the opportunity to produce a sort of time capsule’ that shows how everything stood, at the moment we were born. From this we can predict how the field may develop and, more importantly, where it may need to develop. I suspect that only JISAKOS could perform this task, because of our global reach; for example, each State-of-the-Art Review article has three authors from around the world to provide exposure to geographical practice and experience. By comparison, all other journals are parochial. They only reflect their particular part of the world.

Having said this, JISAKOS’s main challenge, over the next years, will be to secure those few top-class articles written by those few top-class researchers. I have my own thoughts about this. It’s a difficult point, so bear with me.

We surgeons work with our hands, but we also pride ourselves on being ‘scientific’, and following something called the ‘scientific method’. We firmly believe that this is how ‘good’ science and good technology is achieved (and ‘bad’ science is thwarted). What this actually means when an article is submitted for publication is that it needs to be ‘peer reviewed’. That is, everything has to be agreed—as well researched and well argued, hence probably correct—by influential and experienced people. These peer reviewers have an important task, so they need to be neutral.

But what if they’re subtly influenced by other motives? What if they’re really thinking: “I don’t agree with this, because it’s unfashionable”? Or even “it goes against my own ideas, and it’ll threaten my own reputation, if it turns out to be correct”? Or “there’s simply no money in this approach, the funding is all for the other side”.

We may not know much about the philosophy of science, but we do know that people are always people (‘Human, all too human’, as Nietzsche puts it). And, the system we employ might actually be delaying good ideas, unorthodox ideas—even suppressing them completely—and simply because they’re unfashionable.

We can observe the power of orthodoxy and money, when it comes to climate science. Whatever your personal opinion about anthropogenic global warming, you have to admit that when scientists start fiddling the figures and trying to suppress the unorthodox by bullying, there’s likely to be something wrong.

That’s why our systematic reviews must follow PRISMA guidelines and why we choose our JISAKOS reviewers with such care. We deliberately choose them to welcome the unorthodox (you can find the names of our 2016 reviewers on the journal’s website). We thank our influential, expert reviewers for their time and care.

I’m sure you’ll agree that a journal that deliberately dares to be unorthodox—and dares to give new ideas a platform—might just have the advantage.

And that is what JISAKOS stands for.

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