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Journal Interviews : 2008 : October 2008 - Autoimmunity

JOURNAL INTERVIEWS - 2008

October 2008



Autoimmunity

Featured Journal Interview

According to a recent analysis of **Essential Science IndicatorsSM** from **Thomson Reuters**, the journal *Autoimmunity* is having a growing impact in the field of Immunology. Its current record in this field includes 731 papers cited a total of 4,600 times between January 1, 1998 and June 30, 2008.

Founded in 1988, *Autoimmunity* is currently published by Informa Healthcare. Its Editor-in-Chief is Dr. Paolo Casali, who is the Donald L. Bren Professor of Medicine, Molecular Biology & Biochemistry in the School of Medicine at the University of California, Irvine. He is also the Director of the Center for Immunology there.

In the interview below, ScienceWatch.com correspondent Gary Taubes talks with Dr. Casali about Autoimmunity's history and citation record.

SW: When did you become Editor-in-Chief of *Autoimmunity*?

I have been the Editor-in-Chief since 2002. In 2007, I was asked to serve for another five years and I accepted.

SW: What was the state of the journal when you took over?

When I took the journal in my hands, it was moribund. If I remember correctly, the impact factor was less than 1—maybe 0.8. The founding editor had drifted away from the journal in the two or three years prior to that and the journal suffered enormously. The impact factor now (2007) is 2.89, and we're doing very well. I expect the 2008 impact factor to be well above 3.0, which would be remarkable for a "specialty" journal.

When was the journal founded initially and what factors led to its temporary decline?

The journal was founded in 1988. This is its 20th anniversary. It was founded in England by Terrence Wilkin. Terry was an endocrinologist by training, with a strong interest in diabetes, which is, as you probably know, an autoimmune disease. When he founded the journal, the publisher was Harwood. Then Harwood was bought out by another company and that was followed by a number of acquisitions and consolidations. Eventually it was purchased by Taylor & Francis, and then they were purchased by Informa, which now publishes it. Meanwhile, Terry was getting near to retirement and in many ways he significantly reduced his effort in the journal, which is what I mean by "drifting away." For two, three, maybe even four years, the journal didn't do very well at all.

Had you been involved with the journal from the beginning?

Yes, I was one of the founding co-editors and I always did quite a lot of work for the journal, which is why I was asked to take over.

What steps did you take to bring *Autoimmunity* back to life?

The first obvious step was to clear the backlog of submitted manuscripts. The second step was making the journal known again—informing my colleagues, clinicians, basic researchers, and clinician scientists that the journal now had a new Editor-in-Chief and that I was very serious about bringing it back to the original glory of the first days. That, I must say, worked quite well.

Secondly, I found a very supportive publisher in London; that was when Taylor & Francis got involved. They were very supportive when I went there. What was needed was a broadening of the editorial board of the journal, the authors, and the readers. I think their decision to go with an American Editor-in-Chief for the journal was a good one. Up until then, the journal had a strong British and European component, which did not provide the strength the journal currently has with its American root. Finally, a further boost to *Autoimmunity* came from the recent relocation of the journal production to New York, at INFORMA USA.

Another thing I did was start a tradition of commissioning monographic issues from leaders in the field. These issues, which typically account for maybe two to four issues a year out of the eight we publish, are commissioned by me to leaders in the field who then function as guest editors for that particular issue. They then solicit eight to twelve contributions that would be experimental, reviews, or rostrum articles—a rostrum is a very up-to-date review with some opinion and some experimental data as well. And this has worked out very well. This year, for instance, we'll have three monographic issues in total.

Finally, the journal went online, which has had a significant impact. Submission is online, the editing process is online, and this has further boosted the number of contributions. It is helping to broaden the scope of the journal. And this is how we got to where we are today.

Was it difficult in the beginning to get good people to submit quality articles to a journal that had been floundering?

I would not say it was difficult, but it took considerable work in my part. The only tool I really had at first was my familiarity with a lot of good people, a lot of good scientists. I had these connections and I would simply call them up personally and request that they contribute, and many of them did.

Have there been specific developments in the fields served by your journal that may have contributed to the increase in citations?

"Many of our papers are published 10-12 weeks from the date of first submission."

Not one particular subject, no. I think the biggest change since I took over has been more of an internal one: we've become more consistent in the mixture of experimental papers and clinical research papers we've been publishing. We have been trying to publish more of the former than we did in the past. The journal has always been quite broad in the range of manuscripts, the scope of manuscripts published.

How much has the editorial board changed since you took over the journal?

I completely reshuffled the editorial board. It is now a panel of six senior editors: one Australian, one from Brazil, two Europeans, and two North Americans. That goes with a panel of 25 associate editors. I would say the editorial board at this point doesn't have more than one or two members, at most, who had been there before 2002.

Were you looking for a diverse international board to broaden submissions and readership?

Yes, but I was also looking, first and foremost, for scientific quality.

What would you like to do with the journal in the next few years before your term as Editor-in-Chief is up?

What I would like to do—what I will do—is further strengthen the basic-science component of the journal—meaning molecular biology, cell biology, immunology, molecular genetics, etc. That is my primary purpose and I'm already doing that. We just published a monographic issue on the epigenetics of autoimmunity, which I think is quite novel and very well done. I'd also like to make sure we cover those fields and subfields that have been neglected in the last few years.

"...we've become more consistent in the mixture of experimental papers and clinical research papers we've been publishing."

Another thing I would do is be very selective and make sure we publish only the highest quality clinical/experimental papers. We will continue to emphasize research in systemic autoimmunity—for instance, lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, polyendocrinopathies (autoimmune endocrine system disorders)—but we will also continue our interest in diabetes. We've published quite a lot on diabetes. That was the main focus of the journal at the very beginning, 20 years ago.

Has the turnaround time for publishing articles decreased now that the journal is online?

Yes, the turnaround time is now very short. The average turnaround from first submission to acceptance is about a month or six weeks. And this is continuing to improve. Many of our papers are published 10-12 weeks from the date of first submission. That's much, much faster than it was six years ago.

Are there significant controversies in autoimmunity that help drive citations and might be playing a factor in how well the journal is doing?

No, not really. Occasionally I have a letter to the editor regarding a paper that was just published, expressing a different perspective or opinion. I welcome those and we publish them, but that's about it. ■

Autoimmunity

Paolo Casali, M.D., Editor-in-Chief

Informa Healthcare, publishers

Keywords: immunology, publishing process, editorial board, monographic issues, clinical research papers, experimental papers, submission-to-publication time.



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