EDITORIAL COMMENTARY.

IDENTIFICATION AND CORRECTION OF THREE ERRORS IN ONE EDITORIAL IN THE HIGH IMPACT JOURNAL OF PATHOLOGY

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Garfield, the guru of Scientific Information, gave the world in 2006 the history and meaning of high impact factor in scientometrics. For instance, from his tabulation of a selected list of 20 journals ranked by impact factor for 2004, the range was from 5.9 to 52.4. Although the Journal of Pathology was missing from his list, that journal’s front cover page for November, 2006, stated that its impact factor is not only as high as 6.2 but also “1st in Pathology.”

Pathology journal of such high impact deserves scientific study. As it was recently argued cogently, researchers should improve and guarantee both quality and integrity of their sources. Therefore, let us examine the Journal of Pathology in respect of these scientific norms. A worthwhile aspect on which to focus helpful research is on that Journal’s editorials. In general, what do editorials stand for? It was Stephen Lock, erstwhile Editor of the prestigious British Medical Journal, who affirmed that “Signed editorial should be closer to the growing edges of medicine.” In particular, what is the editorial slant of the Journal of Pathology? The answer was provided by Levison who wrote that “We will continue to encourage an editorial policy which will keep the Journal of Pathology at the top of the world.”

World level of current perception of one growing edge of medicine is called “lymphangiogenesis.” Hence, let us examine it with that journal’s editorial written in 2001 by Clarijis et al. In it, the phenomenon was first of all well defined as “the formation of new lymphatic vessels.” Thereafter, there were the following three didactic deductions:

i. “Details of the anatomical relationships between lymphatics and tumour cells, on the one hand, and the occurrence of lymphangiogenesis, on the other, are therefore unknown.”
ii. “The occurrence of lymphangiogenesis in the adult has so far never been reported.”
iii. “All of the ingredients required for lymphangiogenesis are therefore present, leaving only its existence to be demonstrated.”

Demonstrated by this author, as far back as 1963, following his basic introduction of the mono-block formalin-fixation naked-eye method for investigating how lung cancer spreads in the human body, were his findings on employing the standard microscopic method to map out the exact positions of the earliest tumour deposits in the abdominal lymph nodes, namely, the sub-capsular sinuses situated where lymph flows into rather than flows out of these catchment organs. The localization patterns led this author to conclude affirmatively that it is a reasonable inference that the newly formed afferent vessels, which Zeidman in 1959 saw how they developed in his experimental animals, are also a feature of human cancer of the lung. Moreover, during the ensuing discussion, this author advanced three guidelines for future use of such new formations of lymph vessels in research. Accordingly, the above three conclusions published in the Journal of Pathology editorial were definitely in total contradiction with what the author of this editorial had definitely demonstrated.

Demonstrated for several decades is the fact that the Journal of Pathology is the flagship of the Pathological Society of Great Britain and Ireland. Therefore, it is supremely placed to single out any advances in the pathological sciences. And yet this author’s 1963 discovery continues to be missing year after year in its pages in 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, and 2009. In particular, a common denominator entrenched in nearly all these references has been that lymphangiogenesis is a recent concept.

Concept of some importance ought to be studied carefully. In other words, the literature of both modern and vintage standing should promote science. As Cochran wrote concerning pathology, the practitioner in this field owes to
mankind the duty of promoting novel and original observations. Nevertheless, the duty of promotion depends in part on what has been called the contextual importance of citation history. This means that thorough acquaintance with not only high impact but also low impact journals should be the researcher’s foundation stone or else it will be his or her stumbling block. Therefore, as Marie-Claude Roland asked, how do scientific papers and researcher’s writing practices provide evidence that they do reflect the expected quality criteria? One good answer, as seen by this author, was provided for eternity by Garfield whose recommendation was crystal clear as follows: “scientific societies should have some panel members who should alert others to scientific articles appearing in journals they may not regularly read.”

Read in Britain, where both of them are published, are the Journal of Pathology and the British Journal of Diseases of the Chest. Perhaps, part of the present problem was the title of my paper! Had I known, I should not have presented my discovery tortuously as “A modified theory of retrograde lymphatic metastasis in lung cancer.” Instead, I should have titled it momentarily as “The discovery of new lymph vessel formation in human lung cancer.” In all probability, this latter rendition might have changed the history of lymphangiogenesis. In other words, that timeliness, which is the bedrock of scientific communication, would have materialized right from the 1960s. Indeed, the advances based nowadays on lymphangiogenesis would have started in those years!

REFERENCES