Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery & Psychiatry

Editorial announcement

“Silence is the perfectest herald of joy”
(W Shakespeare)

I hope that the lack of response which greeted the new cover of the Journal last year has indeed signalled your sense of joy, or, if this is too extreme, at least your approval that we remain the “green” Journal despite the changes. In this issue we initiate another innovation—editorial commentaries. The results of much research often pose more questions than they answer—that is one of the joys and at the same time frustrations of science. Editorial commentaries will attempt to identify these questions in relation to papers published in the Journal, and at the same time place their results in a broader context. This I hope will enhance your interest and understanding of some of the papers published each month.

Medical Editors Trial Amnesty (META)

Reports of properly conducted randomised controlled trials are the foundation of safe and effective health care. However, a substantial proportion of all controlled trials never contribute to this knowledge base because they are not submitted for publication. This fact has important implications for patient care. Firstly, underreporting of trials reduces the power of systematic reviews to detect moderate but clinically important treatment effects. As a result, patients may be denied effective forms of health care. Secondly, because trials that show more promising treatment effects are more likely to be submitted for publication, research syntheses based on published studies can give misleading conclusions about treatment effectiveness, thus exposing patients to useless or even harmful therapies. Finally, patients may be asked to participate in new clinical trials that are unethical? Some suggestions for improving performance and accountability, BMJ 1998;316:752–4.

Medical editors are acutely aware of the trials and tribulations of research reporting but on this occasion, because of the serious implications of unreported research, we are endeavouring to cleave the trials from the tribulations. We cannot confidently estimate the total number of unreported trials, but we expect a good response.

C KENNARD

For the Medical Editors Trial Amnesty

1 Dickersin K, Min YI. NIH clinical trials and publication bias. Online J Curr Clin Trials [serial online]1993; 28 April; doc No 50.