



Quo Vadis *Angle Orthod*?

Robert J. Isaacson

Where are you going, *Angle Orthodontist*? This is a legitimate question for you to ask. The journal has changed, but the future is never clear. Let's look at where we are coming from and where we might want to go.

I interviewed for this editorship in 1999, and two issues arose then that have stuck in my mind. First, the Board wanted to know where I would like to see the journal go. That was easy. You are a user of the literature and, like me, want accessibility and efficiency in learning new information. It took very little research to discover that the print media was in a serious decline and the advertising dollar was rapidly being captured by the oncoming tsunami of the digital world. This was dramatically true in the news media and moving into journal publications. Second, they asked if I were offered the position, how long I would plan to stay. The intent of this question was unclear, but I said that in most leadership roles, you do your best work in the first 5 to 10 years. At that point, you have either accomplished your goals or your ideas are simply not going to sell at that time in history. With this November 2008, issue I am completing the first 9 years of following in the footsteps of Mother Angle and the great editors that followed her. I am sure you have noticed significant changes in our journal in this millennium.

A journal has several fundamental goals. Its primary mission is to preserve and extend its information base to move the discipline along in its scientific evolution. This must be done in a way that is attractive to you, the consumers of this information. The appearance of the journal and the way the articles are presented to you is an important but cosmetic issue. These things

are never agreed on by everyone, but our present look was developed to make the articles maximally readable and accessible. The digital evolution has had the greatest impact. The print cycle no longer controls the time from acceptance to publication. As soon as an article is ready, it is added to the next available issue and posted online with volume and page number. There are no technical delays in virtual publication.

The pursuit of a broad-based digital journal continues to exceed our wildest expectations. We are well on schedule for another year of 3 million hits on the journal Web site, and the submission and review process allows us to greatly expand and develop the peer review process. When we put the complete *Angle Orthodontist* online free of charge as part the scientific Open Access program, we hit a home run and set the bar very high for others to follow.

Each issue of the *Angle Orthodontist* has more than doubled in size and, I hope, has become increasingly readable. Articles are now limited to 3500 words, and this has probably cramped the style of those who are more verbose. However, we continue to receive more than 600 manuscripts each year. If the past is any predictor of the future, the printed journal will continue to decline as tech-savvy new generations of readers arrive. This will present an economic Rubicon as the cost of the printed journal is much more sensitive to volume while the electronic format does not care not how big the volume becomes. It is not inconceivable that the digital technology will virtually totally dominate the future information transfer experience of many of you practicing today.

The human tendency is to digitally adapt the old pro-

cedures and continue as before. This can result in an automated buggy whip factory. Given the different and greater capacity of the virtual world, the question is, how should the information transfer process also evolve? The option for user interaction is being tried to get more user involvement. The result is a blog type of feedback that is obviously not random. Were it offered as an automated letter to the editor type of action, would it be useful in a research type of journal?

Does the peer review system need updating in this environment? These thoughts speak to the original question of determining the best format to supply information to you, the consumers. No one seriously disputes the goal of evidence-based practice, but how do you maintain evidence-based information that is open to an opinion-based critique? How does the consumer sort this all out? Clearly, the consumer needs to be

well educated, and this must be an increased mission of our educational programs. A collateral problem is the speed of change and the resulting large number of people already in practice who will also need to grow. Personal professional development will become even more necessary, and no one will be able to rely only on what they learned as a resident to get them through a complete career.

Clearly, the future holds many exciting new possibilities, but these options bring with them many new questions. I used to think I lived in the very best of times in orthodontics, and the advances truly have been greater than I would have ever imagined. Now I know that the best is yet to be. What a great time to be alive! The ball is in our court, and we still have control of our destiny. It remains only for us to use it wisely.