

# Editorial

## Quo vadis, IADR?

This month, researchers around the world will be scurrying to finish off research projects for submission to the International Association for Dental Research (IADR) for presentation at the next annual meeting in Acapulco, Mexico, in March 1991. Unfortunately, whether or not their hard work is accepted for presentation at the meeting may be based as much on who reviews the abstract as on the quality of the work. For, believe it or not, the IADR does not utilize one of the most basic principles of review — blind review of submitted abstracts.

Recently I had the privilege of listening to one of the world's top scientists, a Japanese chemist, discuss dental bonding mechanisms. His research paper for the 1989 IADR meeting was rejected by the IADR reviewer. Regrettably, while some studies are rejected on frivolous grounds, others that have little or no scientific value are accepted. One study in particular from this year's meeting that sticks in my mind came to an important conclusion that could have a major effect on clinical preventive dentistry. Yet no meaningful data were offered to substantiate the far-reaching conclusion the authors offered. Why was such a poor paper accepted when a paper from an experienced, highly respected scientist was rejected?

Clearly there are legitimate and reasonable grounds why anyone can have a paper rejected — even Nobel-prize winners are not immune to having papers rejected by reviewers. However, in an abstract of a couple of hundred words it is not possible to include every detail to satisfy the whim of every reviewer who may have the sole say in the acceptance or rejection of the work. Since papers are rarely rejected for IADR meetings or for the American equivalent, the AADR meet-

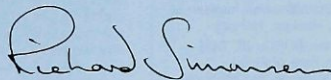
ing, why would the paper of a well-known top-notch researcher be rejected?

While blind review will not solve all problems, it will go a long way toward removing the pall of uncertainty that hangs over an open review process in which reviewers are given the names of the authors whose work they critique. Without blind review, personal prejudices must come into play. Much as we all try to eliminate personal biases in our work and daily lives, they remain poised in our psyche waiting for the opportunity to interfere in our judgment.

For an organization such as the IADR that is so concerned with the sanctity of science and the scientific method, it is strange that blind review is not a routine part of abstract review and acceptance. After all, bias in science is hard to control. No matter how hard one tries to eliminate it, there will always be some form of positive or negative bias involved in the acceptance or rejection of any scientific publication. Nonetheless, bias can be diminished, and blind review is a simple and easy way to do just that.

The minimization of potential bias is the least that the IADR should do for those who work hard to carry out meaningful research. At the same time, the use of more than one reviewer would minimize the chances that poorly designed studies would be published.

Quo vadis, IADR? The time for blind review is here.



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