

As part of our Centenary Year celebrations, we will republish landmark papers and reflections from our archives. This issue we present the editorial written by editor Alister Brass for the 15 October 1983 issue.

THE MEDICAL JOURNAL OF AUSTRALIA

October 15, 1983

Leading Articles

Into the second 70 years

A major reshaping of our editorial team is signalled with this issue of the Journal. After nearly 15 years in various medical editorial capacities in the United States, whence I moved in 1969 after three years as Assistant Editor on this Journal and a stint as feature writer on *The Australian*, I have with great pleasure accepted the invitation of the Board of Directors of the Australasian Medical Publishing Company to return home and assume the editorship of *The Medical Journal of Australia*. Dr Kathleen King, who as Acting Editor for the past nine months has singlehandedly kept the Journal on its true course, now assumes the position of Deputy Editor.

The changes — many of them distinct improvements — that have taken place in the format of the Journal over the past decade and a half are immediately obvious to a repatriot, as is the verve with which the Journal has taken a stand on issues lately. Readers are advised that further modifications will be made in the months ahead — for the better, I hope. As a first small step, from now on the Journal will bow to the usage of medical practitioners worldwide, and record blood pressure in mmHg. When the time comes — if it ever does — that doctors and patients talk easily about “kilopascals”, we will follow suit then. More significantly, the important new Journal section on Therapeutics (announced in the July 9 issue) will start publication on November 12. Looking to 1984, the Journal's 70th year under the present title, we hope to take advantage of Australia's unique geographical situation by playing an increasing role in fostering easy medical communications with our neighbours.

A more insidious, and worrying, change has been the transformation of the Journal during my years overseas from a fat weekly into a slim fortnightly. To some extent this shrinkage must result from the economics of publishing and distribution in the 1980s as compared to the 1960s, when costs and inflation were down and there was less competition for advertising support from the clones of American and English medical magazines that nowadays jostle us for a livelihood. In addition, the Journal's acceptance standards have perhaps risen for recent volumes, so there have been fewer pages of finished manuscript available. Nevertheless, I believe the overall flight of research and clinical reports from the pages of the Journal in response to the siren call of foreign publication reflects critically on the state of scientific medical communication within Australia. (Need I stress that medicine in this country, in all its rich variety, is the full equal and often the superior of medicine in the United States

and Britain — to choose just the highest world standards for comparison?) If doctors in both these countries can support two major national medical weeklies on each side of the Atlantic, to say nothing of the hundreds of equally professional if less prominent monthly and quarterly publications, then surely Australian doctors can provide their own Journal with sufficient and varied original contributions to sustain it not only in its present state of moderate anorexia but — looking ahead again — possibly in a rejuvenated hebdomadal shape.

Perhaps too many Australians still secretly believe — whatever their public posture — that their most significant scientific findings only achieve the international recognition they deserve if they appear under the prestigious imprint of, say, the *New England Journal of Medicine* or *The Lancet*. Publication in such organs certainly assures an immediate readership in the hundreds of thousands (though the geographical distribution of these readers is rarely the most appropriate for Australasian material), and this Journal will never be able to compete on the ground of circulation figures alone. However, in these days of almost instantaneous cataloguing of the full contents of all medical publications (including *The Medical Journal of Australia*) by the computerized communications giants such as the Institute for Scientific Information (publisher of *Current Contents*) and the various national libraries of medicine, a title and a byline in this Journal score equally with indexing in a big-name book. Add to this the vagaries of airmail service to and from Britain and America, and it would seem likely that earlier publication (when time is of the element and the paper is of general interest) could well be achieved by submitting a manuscript first to *The Medical Journal of Australia*, rather than by offering it instead to the Boston Brahmins or the gentlemen in London.

Accordingly, I invite all those concerned with Australian medicine who have something useful to add to the literature — whether in academic research or clinical practice — to consider *The Medical Journal of Australia* their prime vehicle for publication. This is not offered in the all too familiar spirit of xenophobic ockerism, but because I believe we at home can do the job as well as, or better than, the competition; we can certainly do it faster if we have to.

ALISTER BRASS,
Editor.