Communications to the Editor

Communications for this section will be published as space and priorities permit. The comments should not exceed 350 words in length, with a maximum of five references; one figure or table can be printed. Exceptions may occur under particular circumstances. Contributions may include comments on articles published in this periodical, or they may be reports of unique educational character. Please include a cover letter with a complete list of authors (including full first and last names and highest degree), corresponding author’s address, phone number, fax number, and email address (if applicable). Specific permission to publish should be cited in the cover letter or appended as a postscript. CHEST reserves the right to edit letters for length and clarity.

www.journal—Good or Bad?

To the Editor:

Is it time to change the way we read journals, as was proposed in a recent CHEST editorial (June 1997)? I’m not sure, but I know that eventually the printed word will cease to be a cost-effective or efficient way to obtain new information. However, I also believe that perusal of literature on a monitor can never completely replace reading words on paper. Imagine reading Dickens’ Pickwick Papers on your computer screen! I’ve grown very attached to the way I read and learn from journals, and as with most of us, I have developed a system, one which I would be loath to relinquish.

My system begins with subscribing to many journals rather than trying to read them in the medical library; when I tried that, I invariably failed. The journals are sent to my home, and my wife’s first greeting of the evening usually consists of “you got a journal today,” accompanied sometimes by “it’s a really thick one.” The journals go into a stack on my desk, and I try to read part of one each evening. If I don’t do it throughly, they begin to build up, forming a mountain of paper on my desk—an ever-present reminder that I need to read. I usually flip through a journal, marking the articles that I want to read more carefully. Then, when time permits, I pull the journal out of the stack and read these marked articles. Thus, the paper journal is integral to my system, and converting to an electronic journal would force me to change my method.

However, I am constantly aware of the huge waste of paper that I am generating. I save less than 10% of the articles in the journals to which I subscribe, and the remainder go into the recycling bin or a landfill. This waste is being duplicated by thousands of care providers, and the amount of discarded paper is astronomical. This simply cannot continue, and I have a potential solution to the dilemma of how to balance a written journal, with its inherent paper trail, with the relatively new, and potentially user-unfriendly, electronic medium. Publish on paper the abstracts to the original articles, the brief features of the journal (editorials, clinical pearls, pictures of the month, etc), the advertisements, and possibly, the reviews. Then publish the remainder of the journal on the Internet. The “small” paper journal could still sit on my desk providing that constant reminder to read. I could still leaf through it, choosing the articles I wanted to read more carefully. I would then access the full article through the Internet and print a copy if I wanted one for my files. The amount of discarded paper would decrease by approximately 75%.

The time will come when publishing medical journals solely on paper will not be an option. My solution may not be perfect, but it does provide a reasonable compromise.

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Reference

CyberCHEST

To the Editor:

Your editorial¹ made the quest,
What do we think of CyberCHEST?
And we must choose with readers’ care,
The printed turtle or Web-hare.
Our good red Journal must remain,
Whatever else you entertain.
What’s the big hurry, Dr. Block?
Did Playboy bunnies run you amok?

Roberto Llanas, MD, FCCP
Miami Beach, Florida

Reference

The Power of Electronic Publishing

Enlightened and Converted

To the Editor:

Your editorial (June 1997)¹ reflects your lack of insight into the computer/information revolution and departs from your usual informative and insightful writing. The whole point of having information available on the website relates to easy access when you need the information. For example, your editorial (or any article from that issue) could be accessed at http://www.chest.org/editorials/June_1997.html. So if you sent this email to a colleague, they could read this editorial or article online without digging out the journal that is either at home, lost, or in a distant library. You could send this uniform resource locator (URL) to 10