Too Many Journals, Too Little Time

In July 1980, I entered my fellowship training in pulmonary diseases at the University of California in San Diego. At that time, it was rather easy to stay on top of the literature. If one read CHEST, skimmed what was then known as the American Review of Respiratory Diseases, and browsed the New England Journal of Medicine, the Annals of Internal Medicine, and the American Journal of Medicine, one could be on the ‘cutting edge,’ impress the housestaff, and not spend much time doing it. This, however, is no longer possible. The number of new journals has exploded, and the science contained within their pages is truly impressive. At the current time, I subscribe to 8 journals and religiously monitor the table of contents of another 22. Despite my best efforts, however, I continue to fall behind and not infrequently become aware of a landmark article or a well-written review that has somehow escaped my attention.

To illustrate the point, I went to the library and located the July 1980 issue of CHEST. This issue was 120 pages long and contained an article entitled “Surgical Treatment for Chest Pain in Mitral Valve Prolapse.”1 The July 1980 issue of the American Review of Respiratory Diseases measured an awkward 6.5 inches by 9.5 inches, had 180 pages, and contained an article entitled “Is Extrathoracic Airway Obstruction Important in Asthma?”2 In 1980, the journal Critical Care Medicine was a mere proposal. I then located the recent-issue shelf, where I found the March 2000 issue of CHEST to contain 309 pages (not counting the advertisements), with an article entitled “Upregulation of Gelatinases A and B, Collagenases 1 and 2, and Increased Parenchymal Cell Death in COPD.”3 The March 2000 issue of the renamed American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine was 385 pages long (and this doesn’t count the accompanying 138-page American Journal of Respiratory and Molecular Biology), and contained an article entitled “Fine Mapping of PPH1, a Gene for Familial Primary Pulmonary Hypertension, to a 3-cM Region on Chromosome 2q33.”4 To add insult to injury, I found an article in the Journal of Allergy and Immunology that directly challenged a teaching point that I had been making for several years. (Reference withheld to preserve my credibility.)

Out of similar levels of frustration has come the idea for a new department in CHEST. Periodically, beginning with this issue, an expert in a particular area of chest medicine will be asked to pick the ten best articles in the field, from their perspective, that have appeared in the preceding 2 years. This review will be structured in a “sound-bite” format, so that the reader may gain the main point quickly. More detailed information may then be obtained by retrieving the full article. It is hoped that this effort will serve as a print version of the enormously popular Literature Review Courses, offered at the Annual Meeting of the American College of Chest Physicians.

In this issue (see page 228), Lary Robinson, MD, FCCP, has chosen the top ten articles in the field of lung cancer published in the past 2 years. He has chosen these winners from his perspective as a thoracic surgeon. In the future, please look for the “Top Ten List” in such topics as asthma, pneumonia, COPD, sleep disorders, acute myocardial infarction, mechanical ventilation, and arrhythmias. I am particularly pleased with the first submission. I hope you agree.

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REFERENCES