

A watershed for the Netherlands Journal of Medicine: open internet access

J.P.H. Drenth

Associate Editor, the Netherlands Journal of Medicine, Department of Medicine, Division of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, Radboud University Nijmegen Medical Centre, Nijmegen, the Netherlands, tel.: +31 (0)24-361 47 60, fax: +31 (0)24-354 01 03, e-mail: JoostPHDrenth@CS.com

ABSTRACT

As of now, the *Netherlands Journal of Medicine* will become freely accessible online. This represents a turning point for the Journal as open access publishing provides instant and universal availability of published work to any potential reader, worldwide, completely free of subscriptions, passwords and charges. This assures the widest possible dissemination of scientific knowledge from the Journal without boundaries of limited circulation or local availability of a hardcopy. We believe that by opening up we are making research available to a much wider range of readers than our print and subscription model would have been able to achieve.

Now in its 47th year of publication, the Editorial board of the *Netherlands Journal of Medicine* has decided to steer the Journal into the electronic arena. As of now the content of the *Netherlands Journal of Medicine* will be freely accessible online. Immediately after publication of a paper, its abstract will appear on PubMed, (www.pubmed.gov) and from there the full text can immediately, without any obstacles, be viewed and downloaded. This event marks an important point in the history of the Journal and materialises our continuous efforts to make it better.

Over the past three years, the Editorial board has invested a great deal in improving the design and presentation of the Journal.^{1,2} For example, probably one of the most tangible enhancements of the Journal is its art cover. We adopted the art cover because we believe that this promotes the visibility of the Journal, and gives the Journal its own personality. On the other hand, we have worked hard to

improve its content and have attracted high-quality manuscripts from Dutch and foreign authors alike. As Editorial board we have chosen to adopt an active role and this has resulted in a steady increase in the number of high-calibre manuscripts submitted. For a large part, the Journal's content mirrors the research efforts of members of the Dutch Society of Internal Medicine and as such it provides unique insight into the contemporary biomedical research in our country. The Society has a vested interest in advancing clinical research and has an interest in making information as widely available as possible. The first interest of the Editorial board lies with the reader and accordingly, our mission statement indicates that the Journal also serves as a platform for (Dutch) young clinical investigators. We have instigated a yearly competition with prizes for the best original article, review and case report in the Journal.^{3,4} We also started photo quizzes as an illustrative feature of the Journal.⁵ We believe that this yearly contest positively contributes to the increasing quality of the Journal. Without any doubt, the hardcopy version of the Journal appeals to many of us. Most readers have indicated that they like the physical appearance and enjoy browsing through the pages to find snippets of knowledge that are useful to them. Although this is important to us, we must recognise that electronic journals offer readers a particular ease of access. Indeed, with open access publishing, many interests seem aligned, because we get what we want: both speed of publication and free access to important new findings for readers. Ideally, an electronic platform allows readers to work across different journals, find exactly where certain ideas are being discussed, or move readily from citation to source.

In order to provide open access the Editorial board went for a two-step strategy. First, we noted that it could take four to six months after the publication of a manuscript in the Journal before its citation was listed on the PubMed website (www.pubmed.gov). This was bothersome because most researchers take PubMed as an entry point for a literature search. Consequently, scientific knowledge from the Journal that was readily available only reached the scientific community some six months after publication. In close collaboration with the publisher of the Journal we have now closed the electronic gap, and papers are now instantly picked up by PubMed.

As an important second step, the *Netherlands Journal of Medicine* has adopted a dual-mode open access model which publishes an immediate and complete edition of its subscription-based print version online. The full text version was already directly available for members at the website of the Dutch Society of Internal Medicine (www.internisten.nl). From this issue onwards, it will be possible to access the full text version directly from the PubMed website. Each abstract on PubMed will be accompanied by the *Netherlands Journal of Medicine* logo and by clicking it, the full text of the paper can be downloaded as an Adobe Portable Document Format version. We believe that by opening up we are making research available to a much wider range of readers than our print and subscription model would have been able to achieve. We are now able to disseminate important clinical knowledge not bound by boundaries of circulation or by local availability of a hardcopy.

For the near future we foresee that open access will bring some benefits. We are convinced that our Journal will become more attractive to authors who want their results to be read and applied widely. We expect that, in line with experiences with other Journals, our efforts will not only result in an upward trend in manuscript submissions, but

that these will also have a positive effect on the quality of the submissions. There is evidence available which indicates that free online papers have more impact than those published in conventional print-only journals. Actually, free online articles are cited earlier and more frequently because they are more easily available.⁶

As a final step we envisage the implementation of an online submission system. This tool allows electronic submission, aids in the editorial workflow and permits online peer review. We hope that this will enhance the efficiency of the editorial processing of manuscripts and, more importantly, will decrease time between submission and publication. We think that the future is ours, as publication in the Journal assures wide and immediate dissemination. Finally, let us thank those of you who read, submit and review the *Netherlands Journal of Medicine* papers. You make the journal what it is today and the *Netherlands Journal of Medicine* is not our journal so much as yours. As we are continuously working to improve accessibility and quality of the Journal, we welcome your advice and encourage you to send us your comments.

REFERENCES

1. Thien Th, van der Meer JWM, Stalenhoef AFH, Smits P. Why publish in the Netherlands Journal of Medicine? *Neth J Med* 2003;61:99.
2. Stalenhoef AF. Changes in the editorial staff of the Journal. *Neth J Med* 2005;63:1.
3. Anonymous. The Netherlands Journal of Medicine awards for best original article, case report and review. *Neth J Med* 2004;62:176.
4. Anonymous. Awards for best articles published in the Netherlands Journal of Medicine in 2004. *Neth J Med* 2005;63:236
5. Editorial board. Submit your case as a photo quiz! *Neth J Med* 2005;63:241.
6. Lawrence S. Free online availability substantially increases a paper's impact. *Nature* 2001;411:521.

