An Editor's farewell!

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Although *Pflügers Archiv—European Journal of Physiology* is a very traditional journal and, to the core, is the product of the commitment and solidarity of the Chief Editors and Executive Editors, I strongly feel that a vibrant journal should bring in new blood from time to time. Therefore, I have decided to step down from my position as the Editor in Chief (EiC) of *Pflügers Archiv*, a step I take with some sadness but with the feeling of having made the right choice. Needless to say, *Pflügers* has been a passion for me, and I hope many of our colleagues can confirm that I always gave it my all. Since my duties as EiC will end on December 31st, 2015, now would seem to be the time for some personal reflections.

Reflecting requires a standard that must be met, such as our “Aims and Scope”: “*Pflügers Archiv - European Journal of Physiology publishes those results of original research that are seen as advancing the physiological sciences, especially those providing mechanistic insights into physiological functions at the molecular and cellular level, and clearly conveying a physiological message. Submissions are encouraged that deal with the evaluation of molecular and cellular mechanisms of disease, ideally resulting in translational research.*” (<http://www.springer.com/biomed/human+physiology/journal/424>). We sought to combine the heritage of classical physiology with the modern challenges involved in “molecular, cellular, mechanistically, translational, linking dysfunctional physiological mechanisms to diseases,” which I believe is a still valid and ambitious mission. It goes without

saying that I very much enjoy the fact that we have always considered physiology in the traditional way, namely as a comprehensive fundamental science, which makes it necessary to take into account its broad links to all biosystems in health and disease (see, e.g., our special issue on “Channelopathies” [3]).

In fact, I always felt privileged to work for a journal with such a tremendous tradition. I felt privileged to work together with wonderful colleagues, my fellow-Executive Editors, all of whom are importantly active leading scientists, and with a dedicated Editorial Board. I felt privileged to enjoy the wonderful and highly professional support of the Editors in Heidelberg, the Springer staff, many of whom I met during my time as EiC. So, first of all, my sincere thanks to all those with whom I was so privileged to interact and to receive advice and constructive criticism from. Thanks to all of you, my enthusiasm for *Pflügers* has never faded!

When something like a human culture first arose, science, curiosity, and the desire to acquire knowledge, the first primitive form of science, was part of it. As such, in evolutionary terms, science is perhaps even the most important part of human culture. How does science speak to us? We have developed many forms of communication, because, as one of the most important aspects of being humans with culture, we have developed language. In the scientific world, our primary language tools are journals, which allow us to speak to a huge community of highly educated and committed people who share the same enthusiasm and curiosity for not only acquiring but also disseminating knowledge. Journals are charged with this task, and they have to do so professionally. Therefore, quality control is indispensable. I think our peer-review system maintains a high standard, is fair and fast, and in the several discussions I have had with frustrated scientists whose papers were rejected, I have never heard major complaints about the quality of our reviewing system. Altogether,

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Pflügers does not contribute to the phenomenon famously described by Molière: “Many good men nowadays have been harmed by the desire to publish. (The Misanthrope, 1666)” [6]. Therefore, my heartfelt thanks also go to all our referees, to all members of the large Editorial Board. Though peer reviewing is a system with inherent weaknesses, it is likely better than all other quality control systems. It is again a huge privilege to select which content should be communicated to the scientific community. *Pflügers* has its own unique nature, characterized by its commitment to a deeper European understanding of science, producing new knowledge in the best sense of the word. We have maintained high-quality communications to the scientific community. Our journal has a heritage, and, as the EiC, I was always proud that we have preserved this “old-fashioned” stance (see some [2, 4, 5] of historical reflections!) and nevertheless still have a huge potential for advancement!

Preserving and building on a heritage is no mean feat. In fact, like all other journals we have to face the constantly increasing pressure of publishing. This pressure creates huge differences in quality. Of course, a journal like *Pflügers* cannot compete with journals with a stratospheric impact factor (IF), yet what we can offer is fairness, reliability, efficiency, and speed, as indicated by our extremely fast “time-to-first-decision”! Our IF development has also been quite impressive, and we rank among the most highly rated Physiology journals worldwide (presently #13 of all 83 ISI listed Physiology journals). Accordingly, my thanks also go to all our authors, who have continued to turn to *Pflügers* as a valuable journal to publish in! Please never forget that ultimately *Pflügers* is made by YOU, our authors!

Having made this statement, one expected from any departing EiC, I also wish to express my honest belief that, as many colleagues are now discussing, we will see the day when the often unhealthy influence of the Impact Factors will be eliminated, as has already been initiated by the development of more accurate measures for evaluating research, as laid out in the *San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA)* [1].

Over the last 10 years, *Pflügers* has had a rejection rate of roughly 50 %. We decided to maintain a very high standard of

evaluation by carefully selected experts in the field, even if that sometimes meant reducing the number of submissions. Despite the stringent quality control, our average time to a first decision was less than 20 days (in 2014, even 15 days!). We certainly are one of the fastest journals, and I am proud to say that this does not at all lessen the quality of the final published papers. Again, my thanks go to all Editors and referees! Please remember that all this is done on a voluntary basis and only driven by the passion to disseminate high-quality science to our readers worldwide.

Now the time has come for me to go, and to pass the baton to a younger colleague, one who will explore new approaches, one who will contribute new views, and one who is personally, as I always was, extremely enthusiastic and committed to building the future of *Pflügers*. I am delighted that ARMIN KURTZ (Regensburg) is taking over my position as EiC. He is a respected scientist, wonderful colleague, and has been a trusted friend full of humor and ideas throughout all the years of our very pleasant collaboration “*intra muros Pflügers*”. I personally wish him every success in making *Pflügers* an even better journal, and in using this wonderful and traditional “communication tool” to serve the scientific community. I know that, with Armin at the helm, *Pflügers* will be in very good hands!

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