Five years at the helm of Indian Journal of Gastroenterology

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Received: 5 July 2012 / Accepted: 5 July 2012 / Published online: 14 July 2012
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With this May–June 2012 issue of the Journal, the present editorial team completes its five-year term. This provides an opportunity to reflect on the events of the last five years. The Indian Journal of Gastroenterology was established in 1982 as an official publication of the Indian Society of Gastroenterology (ISG). The journal was included in the Index Medicus (now MEDLINE) from its first issue. A tradition of error-free publication of scientifically robust articles was introduced by the pioneer editors, Prof B J Vakil (1982) and Prof F P Antia (1982–1989). These were continued when Prof S R Naik (1989–1996) and Prof Philip Abraham (1996–2007) were the Editors, and the Journal made great strides, including an increase in frequency from 4 to 6 issues per year, and setting up the Journal website (www.indianjgastro.com).

In 2007 the ISG decided, in its wisdom, to select an editorial team of one Editor-in-Chief and two Editors, as against the previous norm of appointing an editor who then chose an editorial team consisting of Associate Editors and an Editorial Board. Thus, I had with me two senior gastroenterologists with great experience in the publishing field – Dr Rakesh Aggarwal, an expert in liver diseases, research methodology and statistics, and Dr B S Ramakrishna, an authority on luminal disorders – as members of the editorial team. With my own interest in functional bowel diseases, the three of us complemented each other well and were able to handle almost all the categories of articles that arrived at the Journal's portal. The responsibilities were thus easy to delegate, with each editor handling the section he/she was an expert in. Of course, as in the past, this did not apply to articles from the institutions where one of the editors

worked – those were handled by another member of the editorial team, to obviate bias. An added benefit was that all three of us had previous experience with the Journal, Rakesh and I having been Associate Editors since 1996, and Dr Ramakrishna having been a member of the Editorial Board.

The Journal went through an interesting time in the last five years. The editorial team strove hard to continue the well-established traditions of high-quality peer review, avoidance of editorial bias, and good copy-editing, and to build on these past gains. At the beginning of this period, articles were submitted initially as hard copy or by email; peer review was done by email; editing and typesetting were in-house activities. The most important change during this period was the move to full electronic publishing. This was done through a co-publishing agreement with Springer in 2009, made possible because of increased funding from the parent society. In addition, all the published articles of back issues till 2011 were made available at the Journal's website as full-text PDF files.

With the introduction of electronic publishing in 2009, processing of manuscripts improved in a big way. All submitted articles are now screened in-house, and some are returned to authors without being sent out for peer review, mainly if these did not conform to the scope of the Journal. Our average turn-around time from the submission to first decision after peer review now stands at around 4 weeks. However, I must admit that for some papers there were unacceptably long delays – related either to difficulty in finding appropriate reviewers, delay by busy reviewers, or by contradictory reviews which then required arbitration before a final decision could be made. In-house editing was replaced by language editing services, which helped to maintain uniformity in language and style.

We strove to publish content that had good scientific merit, met the ethical standards for research and publishing, and was error-free. Our reviewers and Editorial Board

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members need to be complimented for detecting rare attempts of fraud, plagiarism and repetitive publication, allowing us to prevent these misconducts.

Our editorial team worked hard to select articles that catered to the interests of all members of our readership, namely postgraduate students, clinical gastroenterologists, academic gastroenterologists, as well as researchers. We took a decision to do away with Case Snippets, a section that published interesting cases, and converted manuscripts submitted in this category to Images or Letters. New article categories were also introduced. Since we often receive papers based on retrospective review of clinical data couched as research studies, we decided to introduce a new category called ‘Case Series’ where such data could be published.

As our term comes to an end, I feel happy that Prof B S Ramakrishna, one of the members of our Editorial team, is going to lead the Journal for the next five years. In what

appears to have become a convention with the Journal, and certainly by merit, a Section Editor now takes over the reins as Editor-in-Chief. This has allowed a continuity to be maintained in the working of the Journal since its inception. The other, possibly an even more important, factor for the continuity has been Mr Marian D’Souza who has ably handled the Journal office as Editorial Secretary over the last 32 years, while Editors and Editors-in-Chief have come and gone.

I wish the incoming Editor and his team a successful term and am sure that the Journal would scale greater heights under him.

As a parting note, I may add that Dr Aggarwal and I have been associated with the Journal actively (and when I say this, I really mean it) for more than 20 years. We will surely need to find activities to fill in the several hours every week that we used to spend tending to the Journal.