A Commencement for the Journal: the Inspiration of Janus

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With this issue of the Journal of the National Cancer Institute, a number of changes have been implemented, some obvious and others less so. Perhaps the most important change—albeit one that is least obvious to readers—is that the Cooperative Research and Development Agreement (CRADA) between Oxford University Press (OUP) and the National Cancer Institute (NCI) will soon be coming to an end. Under the terms of the CRADA, which began in August 1996 and has run for somewhat more than 5 years, OUP took over ownership of the Journal and began to produce it in collaboration with the NCI. Throughout the CRADA, each party to the agreement contributed a portion of the costs, but one thing that did not change was the editorial independence of the Journal. Nor did the quality change; OUP is committed to maintaining a staff of senior editors to help ensure the clarity and accuracy of articles in the Journal, and the Journal’s Impact Factor, as measured by the Institute for Scientific Information, has continued to increase. The Journal has for several years been the top-cited primary research journal in oncology.

One of the main goals of the CRADA—indeed, a major reason for the privatization of the Journal—was the development of an enhanced online version of the Journal. The Journal has been available online since 1997, and full back contents are now available online starting with 1996. The contents of the online Journal were identical to those in the printed version until recently, when online data supplements began to be added. The enhanced online version of the Journal, JNCI Cancer Spectrum (which is now available at http://jncicancerspectrum.oupjournals.org), goes much further, bringing together an array of content and functionality designed to enhance the Journal’s usefulness to readers.

On the content side, JNCI Cancer Spectrum will include NCI’s own Physician Data Query (PDQ®); cancer statistics from NCI’s Surveillance, Epidemiology, and End Results database; a database of oncology drugs from the Physicians’ Desk Reference; abstracts of Cochrane Reviews (systematic evidence analyses) on cancer-related topics; an enhanced cancer news page; topical collections of “classic” (highly cited) articles (some with accompanying perspective articles), review articles, and book reviews; a searchable calendar of events; and a collection of useful links to cancer-related Web sites. On the functionality side, JNCI Cancer Spectrum will have an enhanced search capability that will allow users to search full text, not only of the Journal but also of a number of other journals with cancer-related content; users will also be able to search abstracts of many more journals. In addition, readers will be able to restrict searches to particular content sources within JNCI Cancer Spectrum. A “Browse by Topic” feature will allow users to browse the contents of JNCI Cancer Spectrum using a taxonomy of cancer. Finally, users will be able to choose from a variety of customization options. Some of the content and features of JNCI Cancer Spectrum will be available free of charge to anyone who visits the site; others will be restricted to users with a personal or institutional subscription to JNCI Cancer Spectrum. Despite these enhancements, the cost of a subscription remains low.

The JNCI Cancer Spectrum that debuts this month is still a work in progress; new contents and functionality will be added in the coming months and years. The CRADA Steering Committee, which included members from both OUP and NCI, collaborated to develop the version that will be available at launch, and the changes that will appear over the next few months are also the result of the Steering Committee’s decisions. The future development of JNCI Cancer Spectrum will be the responsibility of the Editor-in-Chief, the Journal staff, and an editorial board that will be headed by Sylvan Green, Deputy Editor for JNCI Cancer Spectrum.

The print version of the Journal has also undergone some changes. For one, the font size of the “Methods” section has been increased to match the font size of the other sections, making it more readable. This change is in keeping with our philosophy that the methods of a scientific research paper are at least as important as other elements of the manuscript. Second, Articles and Reports will no longer exist as separate categories. All research articles, except for Brief Communications, will be known as Articles and will appear in the two-column format, again improving readability. Brief Communications will remain in the three-column format but will begin with short summaries—essentially unstructured abstracts. Finally, the Accelerated Discovery format is being discontinued, although the Editorial Board will expedite important papers in certain circumstances.

Needless to say, these changes will inevitably be followed by other changes in the years ahead. Indeed, the Journal has evolved continuously and in important ways since it assumed its current form in March 1988. Julianne Chappell, the founding Managing Editor of the “new” Journal, brought boundless energy and vision, serving as a true partner to each successive Editor-in-Chief. Privatization of the Journal grew out of her vision. Bob Wittes, the first Editor-in-Chief, gave the Journal its current look; instituted a rapid, rigorous peer review process; set a high standard for acceptance; added a news section; and ensured that articles in the Journal would span the entire spectrum of cancer research and draw the interest of scientists in many fields. Dan Ihde, the second Editor-in-Chief, developed another innovation: the senior editor function that has become so impor...
tant to the Journal’s success. As the third and current Editor-in-Chief, I have instituted statistical review of every paper with quantitative information. Over the last 13 years, the editorial board has changed and grown as well; it initially consisted primarily of NCI scientists and subsequently grew to include scientists from outside NCI and eventually from outside the United States.

Much like the two-headed god Janus, we look backward and forward simultaneously. We look back on these accomplishments and forward to the ongoing highly productive stewardship of Oxford University Press as we continue to publish an array of important and influential papers on all aspects of cancer. We are honored to continue guiding the Journal into this new era.