
James L. Rutkowski, DMD, PhD
David M. Dohan Ehrenfest, DDS, PhD

During the last 10 years, medical and dental research fields have developed, and the number of researchers and publishing teams has exploded. This recent evolution (strongly supported by the new flexible electronic formats) has led to the multiplication of journals and the massive publication of data from a larger range of research teams. The good aspect of this situation is that it is now easier to publish results and express contradictory opinions. The inconvenience is that it is more difficult for the clinician readers to sort and interpret easily this increased volume of published information. To face the proliferation of submissions and data, many journals have decided to increase their volume of published articles per year. Unfortunately, this often has lead to a succession of articles without real links between them. If this model has a sense in basic sciences (where most researchers only use electronic versions of journals to gather information), it is not adapted to a journal for a community of clinicians such as the Journal of Oral Implantology (JOI).

JOI is also facing an increasing volume of submissions each year, and has gradually increased the number of published papers per year. However, it seems mandatory to avoid the trap of the exponential publication of data that may not be immediately relevant to the clinician. Therefore, JOI needs to create a pathway of editorial development to keep our clarity and relevance for our clinician readership.

JOI is devoted to the publication of research or didactic works in clinical and basic sciences. To address the increasing number of submitted clinical articles and to remain opened to the ideas and materials from nonacademic private practitioners, we recently developed the concept of clinical case letters. However, a significant part of the growth of submis-
sions is coming from researchers (particularly basic scientists). In this matter, the endeavor of the journal is both to remain open to all submitted articles but also to maintain—and even improve—the clarity and excellence of its content. The growth of the journal must therefore be managed by well-defined editorial policies. For this reason, JOI is now developing the concept of research letters.

One common characteristic of all excellent scientific journals (such as the New England Journal of Medicine or the many journals from the Nature group) is the permanent publication of a large editorial content in each issue of the journals. Actually, most articles are various forms of short articles, news, and letters, while the number of real full-length articles is small and limited to exceptional new data. This format and intense editorial activity may look strange, but this is why these journals can maintain their very high scientific quality and also be very reader-friendly.

This notion of editorial content is developed in many forms depending on the journal. Some high-impact journals such as Nature have a professional full-time editorial board that is managing the weekly editorial material in order to stick to the news (and this also explains why the journals from the Nature group are considered not only as scientific journals, but also as weekly magazines for scientists). However, the most frequent form of short research articles is the various kinds of letters. It is an ancient editorial tradition to open the journal to Letters to the Editor, so that the articles and data published by the journal can be criticized in a contradictory manner, even if the authors always have the right to answer (and therefore have the final word in the debate). This custom is particularly strong in American journals (and less frequent in European journals), and JOI already encourages this open-debate tradition.

Another form of research letter is also used as an autonomous format for the rapid publication of data. The concept of this format is to publish quickly good preliminary data (or data obtained with a simple protocol) in a short format. This format is quite rare in the dental journals, but frequent in the highest impact medical and basic science journals. The advantages of this format are the quick review and publication process. This format also allows the journals to keep more pages for larger studies, and therefore to publish more data in each issue. Some excellent journals in engineering, chemical, and material sciences even publish all their papers in this format (for example Nanoletters). This rapid publication format is particularly adapted to fields of research where the turn-over of data is extremely rapid.

Based on these interesting and validated formats, JOI is now developing its own version of this short research article style. Research letters—like clinical case letters—are intended to inform, entertain, and inspire the readers. These letters are normally built in 3 parts: introduction, description of the method and result, and discussion. Like all letters, they do not have an abstract. In these letters, authors should use no more than 1500 words and 25 references. Explanatory and graphic pictures (up to a maximum of 15) are highly recommended in this format.

Research Letters should present in the introduction an interesting clinical or basic science problem or concept to be examined and discussed. Then, the methods of investigation and results are described, and finally discussed. This format is limited to simple protocols, which do not require a full research article. Rarity and overspecialization are not necessary, but originality is highly recommended. When considering the content of JOI during the last years, it is easy to find many articles that could have been published in this shorter format. This new format will free up space in the journal and allow for publication of more articles per issue. This kind of article must be particularly reader-friendly and didactic, even if it refers to a dense basic science topic. This format has to be considered as a
pedagogic tool for research communication, and not as a format for the publication of large amounts of data.

Research letters can follow the classical 3-part format (introduction, method/results, discussion) or use a more open format when the authors want to illustrate a concept. This open format can be used as a discussion on a hot research topic or as an introduction to new research perspectives. This kind of letter is indeed an ideal format to disclose and discuss an innovative concept, before offering a full demonstration in following publications. Additionally, these letters will facilitate the publication of short articles concerning debated concepts or terminology and to clarify these issues for clinician readers. This format is also adaptive to the definition of research guidelines and the open discussion between several teams about a specific research topic.

These research letters require exacting editorial management, as the flexibility of the format implies more control on the form and the content. JOI is already open for these kinds of submissions. However, as this is a new format, authors can contact the editorial team in order to discuss their project and avoid misunderstandings, delays, or rejection of their work. In all journals using this kind of rapid format, the publication of research letters is highly competitive. To avoid overburdening reviewers, a stringent prescreen process is performed by the Editors, and JOI will proceed in a similar way.

In the following issue (Volume 38, Number 3), we will introduce several examples of research letters to clarify all aspects of this new format. It is another step forward leading to greater interactivity between JOI and its readers. This is a strategic editorial tool for the growth of the journal content and the development of open and healthy scientific debates.

REFERENCES


