Annals of Oncology: some modest proposals but some great aims

I have been working for a while now as Editor-in-Chief of Annals of Oncology, and it is high time for me to present my views on how I think the journal should develop after the tremendous work that Franco Cavalli and David Kerr have done in making Annals of Oncology what it is now: one of the top clinical oncology journals in the world. In keeping with their approach, I believe we must work to present the best available research for the benefit of patients.

Fine words, and here are some more. In the Journal we state that: ‘Annals of Oncology is devoted to the rapid circulation of scientific communications concerning oncology, particularly medical oncology. Its character, however, is multidisciplinary, in reflection of the proliferation of activities and interests in Europe, and contributions on clinically oriented laboratory research, surgery and radiotherapy are assured by the presence of representatives of these disciplines on the Editorial Committee and Board.’

In my opinion, this actually involves some very practical considerations. A close look at the composition of the current Editorial Committee and Board of the journal shows a roughly 60/40 representation of European and non-European members, both among the Associate Editors and in the Editorial Board. The work they have done is clearly first rate and their commitment to the Journal does them and my predecessors credit. To consolidate this, I now plan to develop the Editorial Committee and Board as follows.

In line with the new strategy of ESMO [1] it is my intention to make the different disciplines more visible in the journal. This reflects what David Kerr [2] described as the increasing tumor site specialization of oncology, a factor which remains important to the optimal delivery of cancer care. To that end I plan to make one or two Associate Editors clearly responsible for tumor-site sections, such as gastrointestinal cancer, genitourinary cancer, gynecologic oncology, geriatric oncology.

I also want to signal the importance of translational research to the development of oncology practice. Again, I intend that we shall visibly promote translational oncology in the journal through specifically responsible Associate Editors, and I encourage you, as authors, and readers, to consider Annals of Oncology as somewhere to expect, and to submit, the best in translational research.

Many critical issues for the journal are recurring, as they are for oncology in general. As for my predecessors bringing large randomized phase III trials with the potential to change clinical practice is a priority for me. I recognise that this is no easy thing, but having worked with Annals for a number of years before taking on my current position I can say with some confidence that the editorial processes in place are rapid and efficient and I want to assure potential authors that we are open to discussions about express handling of important studies.

Similarly I hope we can use focused reviews to indicate the directions in which we plan to take the journal. Reports of international consensus meetings will also be part of our mission, and we are already working to bring these to Annals [3]. These issues bring us inevitably to the educational aspects of the journal. I would hope that everything we do is, fundamentally, education. Annals has had a CME editor for some time, and I hope very much to be able to grow these activities. In particular I would hope that case presentations can be published to educational effect.

Another important issue for me is access to research outputs. We must anticipate that publicly funded research should reach the widest possible audience. I am grateful to ESMO and to Oxford University Press for facilitating, from the beginning of this year, the entry of Annals into the Oxford Open program. Through this initiative, authors of accepted papers are given the option of paying an open access publication charge to make their paper freely available online immediately via the journal website, meaning that readers do not need a journal subscription to view open access content.

In all this, we must remember that Annals has a global presence, accessible throughout the world and publishing research from all over the world. As has been remarked in these pages by my predecessors and others cancer is a global problem [4, 5], and using Annals as a platform to address those global concerns seems both desirable and entirely natural. We have seen recently that the Japanese Society of Medical Oncology (JSMO) has chosen Annals as their official journal [6], and I thank them wholeheartedly for their support and for this vote of confidence.

But all this comes, will come, at a cost. The time of editors and referees, the space available in the journal, and indeed the time of readers are not limitless resources. To drive the continued success of Annals of Oncology, we must be more selective both at the level of which articles we are able to publish and in the details we communicate. The journal already struggles to publish all the good manuscripts we receive, and yet we must try to take the rejection rate higher; our aim remains 80% rejection. In parallel with this, we will try to ensure that all published articles are as short as is practicable, so maximising space available to articles. To that end we will try to ensure that the word limits on articles – 3000 words for...
original articles, 4000 words for reviews, but with unlimited references – are strictly observed.

Finally, some words of thanks, to ESMO for choosing me for this position, to colleagues and friends for their kindness, good will and support, to ESMO staff and Oxford University Press for making it all possible for me, and some words of hope that I can meet their expectations and that together, we can take Annals forward to the next step in its development.

Jan B. Vermorken

Editor-in-chief, Edegem, Belgium
(E-mail: Jan.B.Vermorken@uza.be)

references