

AMMA JOURNAL VOL 6 ISSUE 3
DECEMBER 1997
Whither the Journal?

by
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As I think I've stated once before, one of the great benefits of being Journal Editor is the right of last reply. However, in this instance, I write with some humility.

Council of the Association commissioned the Secretariat to undertake a survey of members this year, and the full results are published in this issue. I was gratified that the vast majority of respondents rated the journal as 'average' to excellent. I was, however, disappointed (at myself, I would hasten to add) in the fact that about 10 per cent rated the journal as below 'average'. There were a number of specific comments that were made, and I want to take this opportunity to respond to some of them, either directly or generally.

A general theme that ran through the comments was a desire for more papers - and would that I could, but, as some pointed out, to achieve this means the members (or others) must be more prolific. While there are several papers in the pipeline, more are needed. If I could publish five original papers per issue, I would be very happy.

Photos are included where available.

A number of people suggested reprinting copy from other publications. I have deliberately tended to avoid this, except where I have felt that the article is particularly relevant and worthy, and the original publication was unlikely to have been seen by the bulk of our members.

There were suggestions regarding the use of specific topic areas - such as aviation and underwater medicine. This is a laudable aim, but unless a steady stream of articles on these areas can be generated, the longevity of this concept is limited. I have tried to follow this concept at least in a limited fashion, by having each article come under some kind of Section heading. Of course, one can go out to people and solicit contributions, and this is one option that we may more actively pursue (I do have the names of those who have made the suggestions!). I would add that I did attempt to solicit copy from SGADF's Consultants, with only one positive response.

The gentleman who asked for larger print is, perhaps, giving something away; on a more practical note, larger print means a bigger, heavier journal and higher paper and postage charges. I have chosen what I think is the clearest small typeface (and comparing to journals such as the BMJ and Lancet, I think it is probably OK).

The need for refereeing of articles was also suggested by several people. Again, this is a laudable aim, however, until such time as we have a large number of papers being submitted that would allow us to review and cull those papers not felt to be up to a particular standard, probably impractical. Having said this, I do not wish to decry the papers that have been submitted so far: they have been of a very high standard and have, at least, passed the test of my readership.

There were suggestions to increase the publishing of papers from AMMA Conferences and also those of the Directors of Health Services. I guess it is fair to say that I have tended to avoid this in the past, because I am not sure that I see the Journal best fulfilling its aim by publishing papers previously presented. I have also found that requests of presenters of papers for the copy have not been very successful. I will, however, give some more thought to this idea.

While members appear generally satisfied with the Journal, there is obvious room for improvement. I will endeavour to achieve this over the next year.