

From the Editor's desk

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WHO READS THE JOURNAL?

I am glad that my preoccupation with the readership of the *Journal* now has some data for academic teeth to grind on. Jones *et al* (pp. 251–257) reveal the results of a questionnaire survey of UK psychiatrists. Some may find these predictable, but I was surprised to find that the *British Journal of Psychiatry* and the *BMJ* were so far ahead of the rest of the field. This may merely be the consequence of both journals being included with the membership of their respective parent bodies, but even if this is the case, it emphasises the responsibility of the *Journal* towards its readers. If no old age psychiatrists read the *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines*, and no child psychiatrists read *Age and Ageing*, then we must make sure that the major advances in each subject are reflected in some way in the *Journal*.

The failure to find a strong relationship between perceived importance and impact factor is also of interest. However, Jones and colleagues recognise that the *Journal* is also trying to be as international as possible in its appeal, and the views of UK psychiatrists are not going to be the same as those from the rest of the world. As there are more psychiatrists in the USA than in any other country, their influence is obviously going to be greater. Nevertheless, subscribers to the *Journal* come from over 30 countries so our contribution is much bigger than geographical size would suggest. Perhaps we should share the motto of our smallest county, Rutland, *Multum in*

Parvo, although we have some way to go before we catch up with the relative research contributions of our Irish colleagues (Marusic (2004), 184, 450–451). I hope the survey is repeated in the future; I have a hunch that *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment* will have climbed the scale.

BREAKING BAD NEWS (WITH THE HELP OF YOUL-RI KIM)

Although we are moving towards greater transparency in all publications we have not yet come to terms with breaking bad news. The previous editor, Greg Wilkinson, instituted a system whereby referees have the choice of disclosing their names together with their reports. Many were supportive of disclosure but not so much when it came to the bad news of a recommended rejection. So of 315 papers assessed in the last 6 months of 2002 the results showed a significant excess of undisclosed reports for papers that were rejected. Perhaps there were no surprises here either; anonymous bad news is easier to bear than personal rejection.

Status of paper	Reports with names disclosed	Reports with names withheld
Accepted	94	75
Rejected	40	106

$\chi^2=24.3; P<0.001$.

FEEDBACK FROM READERS

We have now had 9 months of this column and feedback from readers would be appreciated. In particular, do you feel there is a place for such editorial whimsy in a scholarly journal, would you like to see more external contributions (only Gordon Parker from the Black Dog Institute in New South Wales has done so to date with his masterly exposition of the K hypothesis), and are you happy for the column to be at the back of the *Journal*? Some editors maintain that the front (contents) and back (obituary) pages of a journal are the only ones that are looked at by all readers – ‘they’re checking who is alive and who is dead’ – and my original aim was for the column to be a mild afterthought for the reader who has torn off the plastic wrapping, thumbed through the highlights and editorials, and is not sure what else to devour. I would like to think a good issue is like an excellent meal whose consumption is spread over several hours, and in the case of a really sumptuous feast, over several days. In this context, ‘From the Editor's desk’ is no more than a pre-prandial nibble, or even a post-prandial one, but I hope it has stimulated a few literary digestive juices.

THE IMPACT FACTOR AGAIN

For the record, the *Journal's* impact factor has now risen to 4.421. Whether this should be a cause for celebration or a mere footnote to the publication depends on your attitude to the IF. Some regard it as akin to a drug of dependence, leading to desperate impact-seeking editorial behaviour, habituation and tolerance to increasing doses, followed by major distress and symptoms of withdrawal when the rating falls. Others, as noted two months ago in this column, feel it is the *sine qua non* of a successful scientific journal. Like alcohol, the IF brand is now too ingrained to be proscribed as a drug of misuse, but perhaps it should be accompanied by a publication health warning.