

EDITOR'S PAGE

Integrating the Flow of Information

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Although not increasing as swiftly as the memory capacity of computers, the fund of new information regarding cardiovascular disease continues to grow rapidly. The new knowledge encompasses the entire spectrum from basic biological discoveries to advances in clinical management. For me personally, it is no exaggeration to say that most of what I do today was not learned in medical school. Presenting this new information so that physicians can keep abreast has been and continues to be a challenge.

The major vehicles for the transmission of new information in the past have been scientific journals and medical meetings. The emergence of the Internet as a vehicle for information has brought with it immediacy, near-universal access, a wide range of display options, and potential cost savings. In fact, when I interviewed for the position as Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology (JACC)* some four years ago, it was commonly said that print journals would soon be extinct. This clearly was premature. Although print journals may someday disappear, they have attributes that continue to make them the primary source of new information for a majority of physicians, according to a recent survey. The major issue, therefore, has not been which vehicle to use, but how to use each to the best advantage. We believe the time has come to exploit the potential synergies of these formats and integrate the flow of new cardiovascular information from these various sources.

The primary goal of a scientific journal such as *JACC* is to publish new original research. To this end we are currently evaluating approximately 4,000 manuscripts per year. The major distinction between the data and information available in journals and that in other vehicles is the peer-review scrutiny that publications undergo to ensure their accuracy, novelty, and importance. Because many of these published papers could benefit by being placed in context, or have major clinical care or research implications, or are controversial, journals often provide editorials and commentaries. Another important role of journals has been to publish reviews that synthesize developments in a rapidly changing area. At *JACC* we refer to these as "State-of-the-Art" papers to distinguish them from reviews of well-established topics similar to those that appear in textbooks. As an organ of the American College of Cardiology Foundation, we also publish guideline documents and position papers of the College.

Medical meetings are another traditional vehicle of information transfer and are a familiar part of the cardiovas-

cular landscape. In fact, with the explosion of new journals conveying original research, physicians have become dependent upon meetings to synthesize multiple studies, resolve conflicting findings, and guide clinical application of the data. In comparison to journals, meetings have the ability to conduct panel discussions, demonstrate video recordings, and even to present patient demonstrations. The scientific sessions of major organizations also provide the opportunity to present original research. A presentation at a national meeting often occurs just after completing studies and usually antedates full publication. However, such data have not passed through the crucible of peer review and may be incomplete as well as provide no lasting copy of the presentation.

The Internet conveys some unique attributes for the transmission of new information. It enables a larger audience to be engaged than at meetings, and has a lower cost than print journals. In addition, new developments can be transmitted very rapidly online, as evidenced by the summary of the proceedings of national meetings at the end of each day. There is also almost no limit to the streaming video or other material that can be displayed online. Given these attributes, it is not surprising that journals have rapidly embraced online publication. Moreover, online versions are available several weeks earlier and often include full-motion video and other content not accommodated in print. From that perspective, online versions of journals can be looked upon as the earliest integration of the flow of medical information.

Although journals, meetings, and Internet venues have generally existed as independent entities, the potential for synergy has been obvious. Therefore, at the urging of Eugene Braunwald, Chair of the Publications Committee, we have begun to integrate these vehicles. As previously stated, we and most other journals have had online versions for several years. These online versions have provided full-motion video, allowed publication of appendices, provided rapid publication for the earliest adopters, and enabled a variety of search features of ours and other journals.

Over the past several months, issues of *JACC* have contained another integration of the *Journal* and the Internet—the Cardiosource Spotlight. Once a month we select highlights of material about to be or recently presented online on Cardiosource. These case presentations, expert opinions, images, clinical trial updates, and other features expand and compliment the traditional content of the

Journal. They also serve to point out material of potential interest available online. Although this may represent slight overlap for some individuals, we believe it will be of value to many others in providing both journal and Internet information in one place. We can even envision expanding the Cardiosource content in *JACC* in the future, just as we assess approaches to provide journal content more completely and interactively online.

For the past several years *JACC* has published the highlights of a number of medical meetings. Clearly these highlights have appeared after online reports of meeting proceedings and even later than descriptions by some “throw aways.” However, we felt that these articles had the advantage of being prepared by members of the program committee who determined that they represent the most important pieces presented. Many of our readers cannot attend either the meeting or presentations, and they enjoy receiving the information with other journal material.

Plans are currently underway to collaborate more closely with national meetings. A number of sessions at the annual meeting of the American College of Cardiology contain a grouping of presentations that provide a comprehensive update on a given topic. The presentations are selected for their timeliness and the presenters for their expertise. The content of these sessions would obviously be an attractive addition to the *Journal*. Therefore, in conjunction with the

program committee, we are seeking to have print versions of these presentations prepared for rapid publication in *JACC*. In addition, the program committee will identify those original research submissions that appear to be most significant, and we at *JACC* will expedite peer review to publish acceptable data as soon as possible, perhaps even simultaneous with the meeting presentation. Rapid access to the information will be of great value to our readers, and the knowledge that the detailed methods and data have passed the scrutiny of peer review will heighten the impact for those attending the presentation.

The quantity of new information regarding cardiovascular disease continues to increase exponentially, and journals continue to be central to its dissemination. Our goal at *JACC* is to deliver this knowledge to those who need it in the most timely and convenient way possible. It seems only logical, therefore, to integrate the flow of information available at meetings and online with the traditional content of journals. Our hope is that a thorough reading of each issue of the *Journal* will keep the reader as fully abreast of new concepts and current thinking in cardiovascular health and disease as is possible.

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