JCI The Journal of Clinical Investigation

A method to our madness

Laurence A. Turka

J Clin Invest. 2007;117(11):3144-3144. https://doi.org/10.1172/JCI34071.

Editorial

Until recently, journal editorial operations and decisions seemed impenetrable to me. Now I have a view from the inside out.

A method to our madness

Until recently, journal editorial operations and decisions seemed impenetrable to me. Now I have a view from the inside out.

> *Though this be madness, yet there is method in 't.*
>
> —William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, act 2, scene 2

As of this writing, the *JCI* has been at Penn, and I have been the Editor in Chief, for six months. This means that one-tenth of our term of office is over, which, depending upon whom one asks at the editorial board, is cause for celebration or alarm. I think after 10% of our tenure has passed by, it's reasonable to ask ourselves, "So what have we done?" or, alluding to the above quote, "Is there a method to this madness?"

I am sure that I speak for all the editors when I say that one of the most fun aspects of the job is our weekly editorial board meetings. Beyond the camaraderie, we learn about science, especially areas that we otherwise wouldn't think about. Much of what is happening in fields as diverse as inflammation, bacterial pathogenesis, and developmental biology is relevant to my own field, immunology. Equally exciting is the chance to learn about new research tools and techniques, and one of the biggest changes readers will see is the inauguration in this issue of the *JCI* of a new category of manuscript, Technical Advances, which emphasizes new approaches that have broad impact for researchers across multiple disciplines and provides examples of their application.

Two of these papers relate to peptides bound to MHC molecules. Le Gall et al. (1) report a means to modify protein immunogenicity, while Wahlström et al. (2) demonstrate a novel approach to identifying MHC-bound peptides from cells directly isolated ex vivo. These advances will be important to vaccine optimization and to the identification of unknown autoantigens in a variety of autoimmune disorders. In the other Technical Advance, van Herwaarden and colleagues (3) have produced knockout mice that are "humanized" for the major enzymatic system responsible for drug metabolism. No doubt these animals provide invaluable reagents for the study of drug development and toxicity.

We initiated this manuscript category because it is clear that while new findings and mechanistic insights are important to our readers, of equal importance are novel approaches and methods with which to address their questions and their own areas of interest. For example, a paper describing high-resolution imaging techniques based on intracellular metabolic changes could be applicable to inflammation, cognition, and cardiac physiology, to name just a few areas.

While on the topic of what makes good reading, this is an excellent opportunity to remind our authors about the importance of broad appeal to our editorial process. The *JCI* is not a subspecialty journal, but it bears emphasizing that neither is it meant to be a collection of subspecialty articles. Some editors are MDs, some PhDs, some both. The best papers appeal to all of us, which means they have to be understandable to all of us. We would like to think we are an intelligent bunch; if a majority of the editorial board find a paper unapproachable, then so will a majority of our readers. Please keep this in mind as you consider sending us a manuscript. We feel so strongly about this issue of approachability that we have put together a team of interns and editors to help rewrite titles and abstracts accordingly (subject, of course, to author approval).

Another goal of the Penn editorial board is to expand the range of articles that we publish. While murine models of human disease remain a staple of the *JCI* diet, studies of organisms such as *C. elegans* and zebrafish, if they shed light on the pathophysiology of disease, are very welcome in these pages. At the other end of the spectrum, we would love to see more papers about clinical investigation. We fully recognize that studies using human subjects or clinical material can rarely be as comprehensive as those in animals, and the editorial board applies a different set of criteria to these papers. Nonetheless, descriptive work without any insight into mechanism is unlikely to get an enthusiastic reception.

As scientists ourselves, the editors appreciate how frustrating it is to have a paper rejected, often without external review. However painful it seems to authors, editorial screening is essential and saves authors weeks of time with manuscripts that the editorial board knows are either outside the scope of the *JCI*, too specialized for the *JCI*, or exceedingly unlikely to garner enthusiastic reviews. Do we err in this process? I am absolutely certain that we do. We are not perfect. However, when we do make mistakes, we are confident that those excellent papers will appear, sometimes to our chagrin, in other excellent journals. More often than I would have predicted, our authors have disputed our decisions, passionately at times. We take letters of rebuttal very seriously, and they are generally reviewed by at least two members of the board. While authors' issues are always evaluated on their merits, we are still human and are perhaps less likely to find merit in letters that include the terms "idiot," "outraged," and "incompetent."

Lastly, while I often hear from authors, I far less frequently hear from our audience. As readers, you are the *raison d'être* for the *JCI*, and I encourage your candid feedback (editors@the-jci.org).

Laurence A. Turka
Editor in Chief

1. Le Gall, S., Stamegna, P., and Walker, B.D. 2007. Portable flanking sequences modulate CTL epitope processing. *J. Clin. Invest.* **117**:3563–3575. doi:10.1172/JCI32047.
2. Wahlström, J., et al. 2007. Identification of HLA-DR–bound peptides presented by human bronchoalveolar lavage cells in sarcoidosis. *J. Clin. Invest.* **117**:3576–3582. doi:10.1172/JCI32401.
3. van Herwaarden, A., et al. 2007. Knockout of cytochrome P450 3A yields new mouse models for understanding xenobiotic metabolism. *J. Clin. Invest.* **117**:3583–3592. doi:10.1172/JCI33435.