

EDITORIAL

Quo vadis?

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The untimely death of Mark Hartman, the founding editor of the Journal, in January of this year has left a considerable void at an institution that he conceived, nurtured and brought to considerable maturity over the first 12 years of its existence. Fortunately for those of us who continue to work in the shadow of his indefatigable spirit and frenzied sense of enterprise, he had established the Journal not only within these islands, but also had successfully navigated the tortuous waters of international scientific communications.

From the outset, the Irish Journal of Psychological Medicine has been an independent scientific voice that did not represent the ideas or opinions of any organisation or body of professionals within these islands. In this regard, it remains somewhat unique among other mainstream psychiatry journals. This unrestricted mantle allows the Journal to be more innovative in its content, while in no way reneging on the necessity for scientific rigor and tight peer review at each and every step of a manuscript's assessment. This independent ethos will be a key component to the Journal's continued success and ongoing growth in the years ahead.

Within the field of psychiatry and the neurosciences, there is now a superabundance of scientific journals competing for survival. Why then is it important that there be an independent Irish Journal? Why not succumb to the attitude that we can (and should) more easily subscribe to any one of a legion of international journals available and leave it at that? The affirmative response to this question lies in understanding the special role that the Journal fulfils within Irish psychiatry and in the interface between Irish psychiatry and the broader international arena.

Psychiatry in the island of Ireland is a complex tapestry of different historical traditions and experiences that mesh together to create a system that is unique and different from any of its derivative parts. Part of this diversity comes from the strong historical links with the British tradition; however another part of this diversity derives from the more recent albeit geographically distant influence of North American psychiatry. The Irish Journal has an important role in reflecting this rich diversity, in expressing the unique identity of Irish psychiatry, and in

underscoring the important cross-cultural differences in psychiatry within and beyond these islands.

Where else has the Journal an important role? The homogeneous patient populations that exist within a relatively small geographical area insures the fact that clinical research of major national and international significance will continue to be carried out in Ireland. The Irish Journal aspires to an ongoing and increasing role in the dissemination of the results of original scientific research conducted in Ireland to a national and international readership.

For the Journal to remain entirely parochial, however, stamps too restrictive a mark on its remit. Over the past decade, the Journal has been more and more successful in attracting a wide range of important papers from international sources, and in increasing its overseas readership. A continued expansion along these lines is envisaged, and the Journal will continue to welcome submissions from all corners of the globe. A smaller journal such as this offers a number of practical advantages over mainstream journals: a more rapid turnaround time, a flexible and accessible editorial policy, and a genuine user-friendliness. Staff at the journal have always and will continue to offer help in the form of organisational and statistical advice to investigators whether or not their work is ultimately published in the Journal.

Negative findings are often more important and relevant than positive findings, but can be more difficult to publish. In the view of the Journal, the presentation of a dissenting voice can never impune scientific truth, and in many cases leads to a better understanding of the truth. In this regard, the Journal is always open to the view from 'the other side' and recognises the importance of providing the scientific reader with both sides of the argument.

With Mark's death, we have lost a tireless worker whose feverish enthusiasm propelled the Journal during the past 12 years. However, his original aspiration to create an independent voice that grasped the nettle of scientific controversy and truth will live on in the pages of the Journal that he loved so well.

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