

EDITORIAL

The European Journal of Neuroscience from 2008 to 2014

Jean-Marc Fritschy¹ and Martin Sarter²

¹Institute of Pharmacology and Toxicology, University of Zurich, Winterthurerstrasse 190, CH - 8057, Zurich, Switzerland

²Department of Psychology and Neuroscience Program, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

We assumed our service as editors for EJN in 2008. Our predecessors Barry Everitt and Chris Henderson had established the ‘modern’ EJN, as we largely still know it today. When we succeeded Barry and Chris, the world of scientific publishing had begun to change profoundly. Many of these changes have continued to pose a serious threat to the viability of monodisciplinary, society-owned journals such as EJN.

The rapid disappearance of the print version may have contributed to the drastic changes in the reading habits of scientists. While readers used to browse a physical issue they now rely largely on Internet search strategies to be directed to individual articles. This development has disrupted the relationships between readers, the journal and the editors. How does a journal maintain its identity and the commitment of the readers to ‘their’ journal under these circumstances? We felt that providing answers to this question, and instituting measures to assure that EJN maintains and grows its relationship with readers and authors were our primary challenges throughout our term as editors.

The rise of open access journals posed additional challenges. Many scientists were, at least initially, attracted by the promise of more transparent, rapid and more interactive reviewing processes promised by these journals. Clearly, however, a large number of the journals and journal series that were launched in the early 2000s disappointed the scientific community by questionable editorial and reviewing practices and their focus on generating substantial profits for the publishing houses. Such journals have continued to threaten the income stream of ‘legacy journals’ and thus the very viability of scientific societies which own or co-own these journals. As editors, we tried to never miss an opportunity to argue, primarily to the members of FENS, that their commitment to EJN translates into a commitment to the educational and other goals of their premier scientific society.

In our first editorial, ‘What is in store for EJN’, we described our plans to grow EJN and to better integrate it into the activities of regional neuroscience societies and FENS (Fritschy & Sarter, 2008). First, we aimed to enhance the perception of EJN as the journal for and by members of FENS. We worked very closely with the FENS leadership and the publisher, Wiley-Blackwell, to better define and enhance the identity of EJN. In this context, it continues to be important, in our view, that EJN is freely available to all members of FENS’ Societies and the Society for Neuroscience, and that EJN does not charge publishing fees. Second, we took measures to



facilitate and optimise the manuscript reviewing process, in part by adding a board of Contributing Editors to the board of Section Editors. Contributing Editors were scientific experts who committed to frequent and rapid reviewing for EJN and thereby supported the work of Section Editors, all of whom were active and visible scientists. Thus, every article submitted to EJN was reviewed by four persons in total (two reviewers, the Section Editor and one Editor-in-Chief), and typically within 4–5 weeks of submission. We felt that this procedure assured a fair, competent and reasonably rapid assessment of the scientific merits of manuscripts. Third, we recognised early on that it was important to enhance the scientific rigour and quality of manuscripts. We therefore implemented editorial criteria for the description of statistical methods and results (Sarter & Fritschy, 2008) and of the validity and sources of reagents, including the specificity of antibodies and staining procedures (Fritschy, 2008). Fourth, we implemented a new category of manuscripts called ‘Technical Spotlights’ which were short technical articles devoted specifically to the discussion of a particular scientific method or of a ‘hot’ neuroscientific issue. Fifth, we established the ‘Featured Article of the Month’ which was selected by the editors and we invited a leading expert in the article’s field to write a commentary. Sixth, we redesigned the Sections of the journal to emphasise its broad coverage of developmental, molecular and cellular, systems, behavioural and cognitive neurosciences. Last, we generated a substantial number of Special Issues (usually 3–5 per year), in part to familiarise a substantial number of scientists of a particular field with EJN and thereby to grow the ‘EJN family’. All these measures were designed to increase the number of submissions to EJN

Correspondence: Jean-Marc Fritschy, as above.

E-mail: fritschy@pharma.uzh.ch

and the quality of published articles, and to strengthen the relationships between EJM and FENS.

The implementation of these measures has had an impact on the profile of the journal as was indicated by article download rates. However, we felt that we did not make adequate progress convincing the broader European neuroscience community to identify with the journal, to consider EJM as their journal that supports their work and their educational goals, and to therefore consider EJM among the journals to which they would submit their best research. Rather, the competition with open access journals, especially PLoS One, remained very strong and EJM continued to be perceived, by many, as an 'old-style' journal that continued to maintain a slow and antiquated review process. To further enhance our relationships with readers and authors, we therefore introduced – with the support of the publisher – an EJM App that provided iPhone and iPad users with direct access to the journal's full contents. In addition, we established an EJM blog and the presence of EJM on Facebook to allow for direct two-way communication with our readers (Fritschy & Sarter, 2011). In 2011, we recruited Dr Sophie Gavarini as Managing Editor who spearheaded the implementation of these electronic platforms with considerable success. In particular, a relatively

large number of readers found access to the main EJM site via Facebook, resulting in a significant increase in article download rates.

Our efforts to grow the journal continued to be challenged by competing developments, ranging from funding shortages, the explosion of the number of open access journals, and the persistent misperception of the impact factor as a measure of article quality. Our successors, Paul Bolam and John Foxe, have had the courage to take on this challenge. We, the neuroscience community, stand to benefit from supporting their efforts to grow and enhance the standing of EJM and thus we need to submit our best work to our journal.

References

- Fritschy, J.-M. (2008) Is my antibody-staining specific? How to deal with pitfalls of immunohistochemistry. *Eur. J. Neurosci.*, **28**, 2365–2370.
- Fritschy, J.-M. & Sarter, M. (2008) What is in store for EJM? *Eur. J. Neurosci.*, **28**, 1047.
- Fritschy, J.-M. & Sarter, M. (2011) EJM in the digital age: introducing the 'EJM blog' *Eur. J. Neurosci.*, **34**, 1711.
- Sarter, M. & Fritschy, J.-M. (2008) Reporting statistical methods and statistical results in EJM. *Eur. J. Neurosci.*, **28**, 2363–2364.