

The Past and the Future of *Arthritis & Rheumatism*

A View From the American College of Rheumatology

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The 50th anniversary of *Arthritis & Rheumatism* (*A&R*) is an occasion to celebrate the successes of the journal that is not only the flagship publication of the American College of Rheumatology (ACR), but also of the field of rheumatology internationally. This article will consider the relationship of *A&R* to the College and to rheumatology as a professional discipline, by looking back to our origins and by reviewing the principles that have helped *A&R* to grow, evolve, and thrive.

Issue 1 of volume 1, from February of 1958, began with an essay by the Editor, William S. Clark (1), and followed with a description of the history of the American Rheumatism Association (ARA) by Robert M. Stecher (2). Clark addressed the rationale for creation of this new journal, the scope of the disciplines it would cover, and the process by which *A&R* had been established. He laid out a broad scope for the fledgling publication that included virtually all of what is now considered to be clinical rheumatology, as well as research in such areas as connective tissue biology and immunology. Clark emphasized the need for *A&R* to reflect a multidisciplinary approach to the rheumatic diseases that involved clinicians and scientists. This philosophy has been expanded over the past 5 decades, and is reflected in the diverse professional backgrounds of members of the ACR, as well as authors and readers of articles published in *A&R* and in *Arthritis Care & Research*.

The list of authors whose articles appeared in the first volume of *A&R* includes many clinicians and laboratory scientists who are well-recognized as founders of

the field of rheumatology in the United States—Richard Freyberg, Currier McEwen, Morris Ziff, Alan Cohen, Evan Calkins, Joseph Bunim, Howard Holley, John Vaughan, James Wyngaarden, Mart Mannik, and numerous others. It also includes several giants of the early days of immunology research whose work helped to establish the framework for our understanding of the roles of autoantibodies and lymphocytes in rheumatic diseases—Henry Kunkel, Robert Good, E.C. Franklin, and Hugh Fudenberg.

The range of diseases and syndromes in the six issues (588 pages) of volume 1 reflects much of the breadth and diversity of the conditions that we aggregate into the domain of rheumatology: rheumatoid arthritis, osteoarthritis, gout, systemic lupus erythematosus, vasculitis, ankylosing spondylitis, inherited metabolic arthropathies, rheumatic fever, and even sarcoidosis. (Although there were no articles on bursitis, back pain, or fibromyalgia.) The first volume also contained a few reviews, editorials, letters to the editor, news from the ARA (now the ACR), and abstracts that had been presented at scientific meetings, complete with transcriptions of questions and commentary from the audience.

The methodology and utility of laboratory tests—especially rheumatoid factor and the LE cell determination—were important areas of focus. Several papers discussed complications of the drugs then in use for arthritis, such as prednisone, gold salts, and phenylbutazone. Among the therapeutic reports was one controlled trial on the use of chloroquine in rheumatoid arthritis. Only a handful of papers or reviews addressed issues such as the epidemiology of rheumatic diseases, outcome measures, and rehabilitation. Often the emphasis was on what was as yet unknown, rather than on what had just been discovered. For example, Sidney Cobb wrote, concerning “rheumatoid disease,” “In terms of estimates of incidence and prevalence, we can

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only say that to date we have no adequate estimates . . . The field is wide open, for there are very few physicians interested in this approach” (3).

I suspect that it will be a surprise to most of the 2008 readership of *A&R* that in the 1950s there was considerable skepticism concerning the need for a new journal such as *A&R*. Journals devoted to the rheumatic diseases had already been established in many European countries and in Argentina. The British journal *Annals of the Rheumatic Diseases* was well respected, and many prominent American rheumatologists felt that it should become the official journal of the ARA. There was concern that an insufficient number of high quality articles would be submitted. Some felt that the development of interest in rheumatic diseases would be better served by publishing advances in the field in general medical journals (4). A decade of debate, recommendations from committees, and surveys of the ARA membership were part of the tortuous gestation of *A&R*, which continued until those who opposed the new journal had retired from leadership positions in the ARA! Among those who should be given credit for the successful launch of *A&R* are the following four individuals: Dr. Robert Stecher, who as President of the ARA called for creation of a new journal in his presidential address in 1948; Dr. Joseph Hollander, who chaired an ARA committee that in 1954 recommended establishment of the journal; the first Editor, Dr. William S. Clark; and the first Chair of the Publications Committee, Dr. Richard Freyberg.

The name “American Journal of Rheumatic Diseases” was considered, but was rejected as too parochial. It was hoped that the new journal would ultimately be international in scope, although the first issue’s authors were almost all from the United States. Abstracts of full length articles were, however, printed in both English and Spanish. Fifty years later, much of the readership of *A&R* and a majority of the papers submitted to it are from countries other than the United States. I doubt that the first editor could have foreseen the extent to which his vision of an international journal would have come to fruition.

It is important to remember that in 1958 rheumatology was not a well-defined specialty, but was instead a focus of interest for a subset of internists, pediatricians, and other health care professionals. The first board examinations that certified specially trained physicians as rheumatologists were many years away—not until 1972 did the first cohort of prospective rheumatologists pass their boards (5). In the absence of a subspecialty board, it seems likely that *A&R*, along with

other journals, played a prominent and essential role in establishing the dimensions and content of the field of rheumatology. A specialized journal has the potential to provide focus and unity within a field of medicine—in the case of *A&R* it may have helped to actually create the discipline of rheumatology in the United States.

Many of the principles that guide *A&R* today are identical to those that were articulated when it was founded. Among the most important is a commitment to quality—the publication of the very best research relevant to the rheumatic diseases. Quality is not solely a standard to be demanded from the authors, but must also be reflected in the work of the Editor, the reviewers, and the production staff of the journal. When *A&R* was founded, the Editorial Board of the new journal and the ARA Publications Committee were a who’s-who of luminaries in the field (Figure 1).

It seems that once *A&R* finally got going, there was widespread agreement that it ought to succeed, a consensus that has remained solid over its first half-century. Editorship of *A&R* is arguably the most significant and prestigious position in the field of rheumatology. The position is reassigned every 5 years and the competition for this post is fierce. The selection of an Editor is the most important task of the Publications Committee, and is conducted in a process that is rigorous and fair. The result has been a continuous succession of outstanding Editors, who have brought the highest level of talent and dedication to their role. These Editors have, in turn, assembled Editorial Boards and rosters of reviewers, international in scope, whose depth and breadth of expertise is the best that rheumatology has to offer.

What might be overlooked, except by authors who have published a paper in *A&R*, is the contribution of the editorial staff, led in recent decades by Jane Diamond, to the quality and rigor of every article. The production process not only corrects mistakes in spelling and grammar, but also analyzes the content of every paper in depth to assure consistency and accuracy. Errors in figures and figure legends, or discrepancies between the methods section of a paper and the figure legends are identified and corrected before publication. It is not an exaggeration to state that the production standards of *A&R* are matched by few, if any, other journals in biology or medicine.

Another principle, one that governs the relationship between the ACR and *A&R*, is editorial independence. It is the Editor, not the ACR or its officers, who has control, absolute control, over what appears in the pages of *A&R*. While oversight of the operations of *A&R*

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Figure 1. Editorial Board and Publication Committee, 1958.

and its sibling *Arthritis Care & Research* is provided by the Publications Committee, there is no meddling in the month-to-month content. If the Editor wishes to expand the number of pages, ACR approval is needed, but what goes into those pages reflects the judgment of the Editor, assisted by the Editorial Board. Independence of the Editor also means that he or she must be free of conflicts of interest, actual or perceived, so that *A&R* can be legitimately viewed as an authoritative and unbiased source of information and viewpoints on advances in science and clinical medicine, as well as on issues that

may be controversial. The Editor of *A&R* is therefore prohibited from a wide range of activities, such as service as a consultant for pharmaceutical manufacturers, which could impinge on his or her independence of judgment. Professional conflict-of-interest standards have steadily evolved over the past two decades to become more stringent, and the Ethics Committee of the ACR acts as a monitor of the integrity of the College, including its journal Editors.

The ACR, like any professional organization, frequently needs to communicate both with its members

and with a variety of other constituencies. One option could be to use its scientific journals as communication vehicles. The purposes of *A&R* are, however, to educate its readers and to advance the science and practice of rheumatology. These purposes would be diluted or obscured by its use to communicate the position of the ACR on topics such as pending legislation or regulations that could impact physician reimbursement, notwithstanding the importance of such matters to the membership of the ACR. Therefore, topics of interest to ACR members that appear in the pages of *A&R* are limited to educational information—announcements about scientific meetings and courses, for example. Other venues serve the needs of the ACR and its members to communicate with each other about current professional issues, including *The Rheumatologist*, a new publication launched one year ago that is edited by former *A&R* Editor David Pisetsky.

Elsewhere in this issue, the current *A&R* Editor, Michael Lockshin, discusses the accelerating changes in scientific publication, such as electronic publication and open access journals. Each Editor of *A&R* has been an innovator, altering the format of material published in the journal. The electronic tools now at our disposal should not be viewed as a threat, but rather as an opportunity for *A&R* to expand the reach of its educational mission by increasing access and by being ever more timely in up-dating knowledge in the field of rheumatology. As the striking workforce deficiencies in rheumatology become a focus for prompt action, we should consider how *A&R* can educate trainees at all levels, ranging from fellows who present articles in

journal clubs to medical students learning about rheumatology for the first time, and even to high school or college students whose career directions are as yet unformed. Instant electronic access to advances in rheumatology published in *A&R*, coupled with an explanation or translation of these advances for the less specialized or sophisticated student, could be a way to spark interest in a career as a rheumatologist, allied health professional, or researcher.

A&R will never be replaced by a blog! Blogs can provide information, which, if verifiable, can be viewed as legitimate knowledge. A talented Editor, however, can make sure that a great journal will impart not just knowledge but also wisdom. Rheumatology has flourished over the past 50 years because it has grown not just in knowledge but also in wisdom. If we look to the future with an open mind—and continue to recruit great Editors for *A&R*—the progress of the next 50 years, and the role of *A&R* in conveying, stimulating, and focusing that progress will dwarf our past accomplishments.

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