Proceedings vs. Peer Review

George O. Waring III, MD, FACS, FRCOphth

This issue of the Journal of Refractive Surgery differs from most in two ways. First, there is a commercial advertiser/sponsor for the issue — CIBA Vision Ophthalmics and Autonomous Technologies Corporation. Procuring a sponsor has allowed us to publish an additional issue of the journal, which increases the volume and speed of publication. Second, this issue contains both peer-reviewed articles and Proceedings of the Aegean Cornea II Congress, the latter not peer-reviewed.

Is it appropriate to mix these two types of communication in a single issue of a peer-reviewed journal? We think so, but realize fully that the rigor of the two types of publications is completely different: a peer-reviewed article undergoes pummeling not only by the reviewers but by the editors and copywriters, whereas the proceedings have undergone only general editorial review. Therefore, we take the following steps to distinguish the two types of publications.

1. The proceedings are clearly labeled as such in the table of contents and in the text.
2. The page numbers are distinguished by the letter “S” standing for supplement, for the proceedings.
3. The table of contents is offset by a box and the pages offset by a gray screen, to indicate the supplemental nature of the proceedings.
4. All articles undergo editorial review, eliminating claims that do not seem to follow from the data and articles that add little original material to the literature.

Why publish the proceedings at all? This fulfills one of the goals of the Journal of Refractive Surgery — to communicate as rapidly and completely as possible the current state of refractive surgery. Numerous professional societies publish their proceedings (many of which have indeed undergone peer review) as supplements — such as the ARVO abstract supplements to Investigative Ophthalmology and Visual Science, the American Academy of Ophthalmology program supplement to the journal Ophthalmology, and the American Ophthalmological Society's annual Transactions. All of these formats take advantage of the publication process to present recent, non-peer reviewed material that may be of use to the readers, as long as it is properly identified and labeled.

But is it fair to the authors who have endured the discipline of drafting original articles, the pain of receiving reviewers’ critical comments, the anguish of rewriting the paper, and the arduous task of final revisions in page proofs? Why should those presenting a simple paper at a meeting have it published in the same journal and citable through the Index Medicus? Here, we come down to the simple question of quality and pride of authorship. Those who publish original, peer-reviewed articles have their articles labeled as such and judged as such by the readers. Those who publish proceedings have articles that carry the “Scarlet letter S” on their pagination, and are appreciated by their colleagues for a brief, less formal communication. Indeed, some papers are pulled out of proceedings and rewritten and expanded and published as original articles at the discretion of the author.

The Journal of Refractive Surgery has numerous goals, including the maintenance of the highest quality scientific communication. At the same time, we have a goal that the Journal should serve as a “one-stop shopping” source of information on refractive surgery, and thus we include more colloquial forms of communications, such as news, abstracts with comment, editorials and opinions — and proceedings of meetings.

We thank CIBA Vision Ophthalmics and Autonomous Technologies Corporation for sponsoring this issue of the Journal of Refractive Surgery.

George O. Waring III, MD, FACS, FRCOphth
Editor-in-Chief