

## PUBLISH AND PERISH

“*Publish or perish*” is the sword of Damocles that hovers over researchers, whose publishing productivity is linked to professional reputation, grant support, academic tenure and promotion. The pressure to publish has an obvious downside — a growing avalanche of published research papers and the steady expansion of new journals into the niche markets of academia and research.

In his essay *The publishing game: getting more for less*, United States science commentator William Broad reminds us that James D Watson was promoted to associate professor at Harvard nearly 50 years ago on the strength of 18 publications, including his legendary paper on DNA. That today most candidates would need at least 50 or even 100 articles reflects a shift in emphasis in research publication from quality to quantity.

Indeed, this has spawned such unsavoury practices as *salami publication* (where researchers publish their findings in multiple, short papers, usually in different journals, rather than in one substantive paper); *redundant publication* (where the same results are published in different journals); *gift publication* (in which the only contributions made by some authors are their names); and *factitious publication* (where data are lifted from other people’s published work or simply fabricated).

But to what extent does all this matter? Frank Davidoff, a US medical editor, recently noted that “science does not exist until it is published... and read”.

With more than four million biomedical articles published annually, it is highly likely that a considerable number are neither read nor cited.

The time is long past for academia and research granting bodies to put their houses in order and emphasise quality rather than quantity of research output. Should they fail to do so, researchers’ names will increasingly be associated with large volumes of work of questionable quality, and the maxim “*publish or perish*” will effectively become “*publish and perish*”.

*Martin B Van Der Weyden*

## LETTERS

<b>Relapsing vivax malaria</b> Scott J Kitchener, Isaac Seidl	502
<b>Household infrastructure in Aboriginal communities and the implications for health improvement</b> Paul J Torzillo, Paul Pholeros Ross S Baillie	502 503
<b>Diagnostic and therapeutic procedures among Australian hospital patients identified as Indigenous</b> James S Lawson Joan Cunningham	504 504
<b>Hindsight bias in medicolegal expert reports</b> Peter C Arnold John B Hickie, AO Thomas B Hugh, G Douglas Tracy	504 505 505
<b>Predictive genetic testing in children</b> Fiona H Richards, Roslyn J Tassicker, Jennifer G R Kromberg, Barbara M Singaram	507
<b>Ethics and evidence-based medicine</b> Gil M Anaf Malcolm H Parker, Chris B Del Mar, Paul P Glasziou	507 507
<b>Aboriginal language interpreting service</b> Tea C Dietterich	508

## BOOK REVIEWS

<b>Clinical use of blood in medicine, obstetrics, paediatrics, surgery and anaesthesia, trauma and burns</b> <i>reviewed by James Isbister</i>	471
<b>Management of dementia</b> <i>reviewed by Dina LoGiudice</i>	499
<b>Evidence based healthcare. How to make health policy and management decisions. 2nd edition.</b> <i>reviewed by Donald A Campbell</i>	499

## OBITUARY

<b>John Frances McCaffrey</b> Ian C Bennett	498
--	-----

## SNAPSHOT

<b>Fatalities from bread tag ingestion</b> Trevor W Beer	506
---	-----

<b>IN THIS ISSUE . . .</b>	454
----------------------------	-----

<b>BOOKS RECEIVED</b>	498
-----------------------	-----

<b>TIME CAPSULE:</b> Rural Crisis <i>circa</i> 1960s	500
--	-----

<b>IN OTHER JOURNALS . . .</b>	501
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<b>COVER:</b> Daisy Napaltjarri Jugadai. <i>Antiti, near Five Mile</i> . 1998. Acrylic on linen. The Edith Cowan University Art Collection	
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