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

Relapsing vivax malaria
Scott J Kitchener, Isaac Seidl 502

Household infrastructure in Aboriginal communities and the implications for health improvement
Paul J Tortillo, Paul Hoderos 502
Ross S Bailie 503

Diagnostic and therapeutic procedures among Australian hospital patients identified as Indigenous
James S Lawson 504
Joan Cunningham 504

Hindsight bias in medicolegal expert reports
Peter C Arnold 504
John B Hickie, AO 505
Thomas B Hugh, G Douglas Tracy 505

Predictive genetic testing in children
Fiona H Richards, Roslyn J Tassicker, Jennifer G R Kromberg, Barbara M Singaram 507

Ethics and evidence-based medicine
Gil M Anaf 507
Malcolm H Parker, Chris B Del Mar, Paul P Glasziou 507

Aboriginal language interpreting service
Tea C Dietterich 508

BOOK REVIEWS

Clinical use of blood in medicine, obstetrics, paediatrics, surgery and anaesthesia, trauma and burns reviewed by James Isbister 471

Management of dementia reviewed by Dina LoGiudice 499

Evidence based healthcare. How to make health policy and management decisions. 2nd edition. reviewed by Donald A Campbell 499

OBITUARY

John Frances McCaffrey
Ian C Bennett 498

SNAPSHOT

Fatalities from bread tag ingestion
Trevor W Beer 506

IN THIS ISSUE . . .

BOOKS RECEIVED 498

TIME CAPSULE: Rural Crisis circa 1960s 500

IN OTHER JOURNALS . . . 501