

Editorial or Commentary

K G Lim, FRCS

Editor-in-chief, Medical Journal of Malaysia. 4th Floor MMA House, Kuala Lumpur

The Chamber's dictionary defines an editorial as 'n. an article in a newspaper written by an editor or leader writer'. Medical journals had origins, long ago, from the same mould as newspapers. However, over the years the articles we publish have taken on the distinct features of being primarily for scientific findings - reports written about observations or experiments done following elementary principles of establishing facts. The scientific reports themselves by convention now follow the IMRAD structure - namely Introduction, Methods, Results and Discussion. Like the newspapers, medical journals also usually carried a piece by the editor. What might the editor be expected to write? Often, the editor wrote about the organisation that sponsored the journal. The editor might also discuss developments related to medicine and health in general, and of course comment on articles published in that particular issue of the journal. Over time the latter became the most common topic for the editorial.

As the editor cannot be expected to have sufficient background knowledge about the scientific work published in the ever expanding intricacies of medicine, it became practice for the editor to seek out experts in the specialty concerned to write the editorial about some article that he deems most deserving of comment. Hence, the inclusion of the term 'leader writer' in the definition of an editorial. The MJM has had a similar development in its history. From the latter part of AA Sandosham's tenure in the early 1970s as editor he did not write all the editorials.

Editorials like these, by nature, can best be described as commentaries. As such we see many journals now choosing to use the term Commentary instead. We see this even in the non-scientific publication world. In the Economist, every major article has a related short commentary at the front of that issue. The MJM is now starting a section we will entitle Commentary and want to define its scope.

Commentaries will usually be about an article or several articles published in that particular issue of the journal, but can also be about some issue about the practice of medicine that is current. It is to give a different perspective on the said article, either to put it into a wider context, give a different opinion or advocate a cause. Authors of scientific findings are in general encouraged to be objective in their report, but the findings an author presents may actually stir in his heart hopes for action. The avenue is open for authors to write commentaries about their own articles. However, most commentaries will be invited ones.

We have now included under our instructions to authors, noted about writing a commentary for the MJM.

"Commentaries will usually be invited articles that comment on articles published in the same issue of the MJM. However, commentaries on issues relevant to medicine in Malaysia are welcomed. They should not exceed 1,200 words. They maybe unstructured but should be concise. When presenting a point of view it should be supported with the relevant references where necessary."