FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Continuity and Innovation

Helmut Remschmidt

These two words sum up my 35 years of activity for *Deutsches Ärzteblatt*: three and a half decades in which scientific journalism went through major changes, yet in many ways maintained continuity with the past.

For this journal, continuity has meant sustaining the interest of its readers, as well as preserving the stable scientific and economic basis that any journal needs in order to be innovative. Over the years in which I was involved with *Deutsches Ärzteblatt*, I was able to devote my efforts to the achievement of these goals.

Scientific advisor and deputy scientific editor

In 1982, I succeeded Hubert Harbauer (1919–1980) as scientific advisor—“specialty editor” (Fachredakteur) in traditional *Deutsches Ärzteblatt* terminology—for child and adolescent psychiatry on the scientific editorial board of the journal. I assumed this position after a lengthy interview with Rudolf Gross (1917–2008), an internist who was then the chief scientific editor. Our interaction had something of the nature of the final oral examination that German medical students take before licensure.

Then as now, an annual editorial conference was held in Cologne every November, at which the representatives of each specialty suggested and discussed topics for the articles of the coming year. The discussions back then were much more boisterous than they are now, sometimes even bellicose. This was owing not just to the matters at hand, but also to a number of strong personalities, none of whom showed a willingness to let someone else have the last word. For many years now, however, our discussion culture has been evolving in the right direction, toward sticking to the subject and treating colleagues with friendliness and respect.

The deputy scientific editors under Rudolf Gross were, first, the surgeon Edgar Ungeheuer (1920–1992) and then the internist Gotthard Schettler (1917–1996). In the beginning of 1989, Elmar Doppelfeld, a specialist in nuclear medicine and medical ethics, took over the position of chief scientific editor, and I was named his deputy. In 2004, the psychiatrist Christopher Baethge became chief scientific editor. I was fortunate to enjoy a friendly relationship and a collegial, innovative collaboration with both.

International publication of articles

A survey of the years 1982–2017 reveals that the medical-scientific part of *Deutsches Ärzteblatt*, together with its English-language online version,

Deutsches Ärzteblatt International, has turned into a respected journal that can take its place proudly among its counterparts around the world. This positive development resulted from a number of important measures taken over this period:

- The reviewing system was intensified, with strict orientation to quality measures and ethical guidelines. The critical assessment of manuscripts is among the more important tasks of the editorial board. We also have enormous respect for the work that our authors put into their articles for the journal, and we show it by paying them an honorarium.

- Continuing medical education (CME) was introduced in 2004. *Deutsches Ärzteblatt* now plays the leading role in this area among all German medical journals, with an average of more than 20 000 participants per article.

- A transition was made to publication of the entire scientific part of the journal in both German and English. Every article in the scientific part now appears in full, in English, in the free online journal *Deutsches Ärzteblatt International*.

- By becoming bilingual, the journal was fit to be included in the reference databases that have become so important for literature searching in recent decades, such as Embase and Medline (accessible via the PubMed portal), to name only two of the larger ones.

- *Deutsches Ärzteblatt International* also received an impact factor, which is now a matter of crucial importance to authors, unlike in the early 1980s. Its impact factor of 4.257 is the highest among all medical journals written entirely or partly in German.

- The journal actively seeks to include systematic reviews and randomized trials—two types of medical publication that are of particular value in today's era of evidence-based medicine. At the same time, narrative (“selective”) reviews remain a central article type for the journal and its readers.

- The journal became a participant in the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors, a group of 14 medical journals (among them the New England Journal of Medicine, Lancet and JAMA) that proposes rules for important aspects of medical scientific publishing, including the definition of authorship, declaration of conflicts of interest, and data sharing.

A wide range of topics

In selecting content for *Deutsches Ärzteblatt*, the scientific editorial office has consistently tried to take account of developments in the entire field of medicine, as is revealed in the thematic variety of

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the articles that appear in it. The journal seeks to document innovations in both diagnostic and therapeutic methods in all medical specialties. Interdisciplinary collaboration has increased over the past few decades; this is manifested in the trend toward publications by authorial teams rather than by single authors. The psychological and social dimensions of illness are dealt with in many articles as well.

An increasing threat to medicine as a whole, and to practicing physicians in particular, now comes from the boundless economization and bureaucratization of the entire health-care sector. A basic change in thinking is needed in this area, and *Deutsches Ärzteblatt* is a suitable organ for the launching of physicians' initiatives to revitalize health care.

Overview

In the 35 years at *Deutsches Ärzteblatt* that I can now look back on, there were, of course, controversies as well. All of them were resolved constructively in collaboration with the journal's publishers, chief editors, and business managers. Further desirable improvements would include, in my view, the following:

- an increase in the number of pages, now rather small, that are made available to the scientific editorial office each week,
- and the reintroduction of book reviews, which quite simply belong in any scientific publication.

For me personally, discussions in editorial conferences, and, in fact, the totality of my work for *Deutsches Ärzteblatt* have been a highly enriching experience. I have had a unique opportunity to stay in touch with all

of medicine and to have the assistance of highly competent colleagues in all specialized and academic matters. The same advantages are enjoyed by the readers, who are treated to a uniquely broad spectrum of topics among all German-language medical publications.

My work for *Deutsches Ärzteblatt* and my largely parallel service in the scientific advisory board of the German Medical Association (1984–2012, including 10 years as deputy chairman) enabled me to participate in both capacities in the development of position papers and guidelines that are of importance for all physicians.

I take my leave of the editorial board with a bit of wistfulness, with much gratitude, and with contentedness as I look back on the development of *Deutsches Ärzteblatt*, in which I was able to play a role for many years. Finally, I look forward to keeping up on further advances in medical science as a reader of this important journal.

Conflict of interest statement

The author states that he has no conflict of interest.

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