Where the rubber hits the road: the translational pulse of reproductive biology

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As a journal, MHR is not unique in facing a future with many challenges relating to potential scientific misconduct, the publication of data, open versus restricted access, electronic versus paper publishing and more. We are continually trying to assess how people read journals and importantly the most effective ways to assist our audience in providing the information they require how and when they need it.

MHR as part of the European Society of Human Reproduction and Embryology (ESHRE) stable and in collaboration with Oxford University Press (OUP) is facing such challenges from a position of enormous strength. The considerable resources and experience of OUP and ESHRE allow us to innovate and take calculated risks.

The primary role of MHR is to solicit and publish high-quality papers that have the clear potential to make an important impact on our discipline. This is where MHR has and will continue to focus. Steve Hillier pioneered and continually drove this agenda with boundless enthusiasm, commitment, remarkable skill and a high degree of acumen. It is my task, along with the Associate Editors, to reinforce this momentum and maintain a forward trajectory.

Using the New Research Horizon Reviews and a collection of papers around a common theme, MHR has been very successful in publishing key papers focussing on the scientific/clinical interface of reproductive medicine. An example is related to the potential power of the ‘omics’ revolution. Another is the packaging and the impact of damage to the paternal genome. Both special issues have been very well received and cited (in the range 4–16 cites per paper per citation year). Additionally, we have sought and published important primary data manuscripts.

The editorial strategy for the next 3 years will be to continue to solicit papers, where there are clear mechanisms addressed and to heighten the focus on the basic science and the basic science/clinical interface—‘where the rubber hits the road’. There is a tremendous amount to do in this arena. One of the many fascinating aspects of reproductive medicine is the willingness and speed with which potential new developments are translated into the clinical practice. Sometimes, this has been too rapid, but it illustrates the great potential of basic research in the discipline to make an immediate impact.

A very important challenge is to incorporate into our subject the skills and knowledge from related disciplines. An example is that of developmental biology. Sperm oocyte interaction and the resultant early embryo development involve breathtaking changes in the cells encompassing fundamental issues such as reprogramming and cell fate to name a few. Now, with the use, for example, of time lapse imaging and the accessibility of defined populations of human embryos, is the time to marry the areas of developmental biology and assisted conception. The focus should not just apply to animal biology. Plants hold key lessons to be learnt for example in the fertilization process. There is scope for bringing different disciplines together, e.g. ‘The sperm flagella—where physics and mathematics meet biology and engineering’. There could be tremendous potential benefits from bridging subjects, addressing common problems and putting these in the context of reproductive medicine.

So, the editorial strategy is to try and encourage the above interactions by securing high-quality primary papers and developing a series of hard hitting themes. The Associate Editors have been charged with these tasks. Your fellow reproductive biologists should be beside themselves with excitement. If not, check they have a pulse!