Letters to the Editor

Concern about TMD: a comment from ‘the international forum’

TO THE EDITOR: Concern is what I, as a reader of Acta Odontologica Scandinavica, want to show. The immediate cause for the disclosure of my concern is the paper by Kuttila et al, published in the journal last year. This paper, together with the policy of the journal, caused my reaction.

The explanation for my twofold concern is based on the fact that the impact of a published paper exceeds the importance of the paper as such. Frequently, papers are cited and applied as a standard or key paper for the next publications and scientific presentations. Papers published in Acta, according to the policy of the journal, strive to make Scandinavian dental research known to an international forum. Once the papers are published, they can obviously no longer be discussed in Acta, at least by the international forum. Only Scandinavian authors and others working at Scandinavian institutions are invited to contribute to the journal.

International researchers could, of course, appeal to other journals to make their concern known. However, apart from the risk that such a journal is not interested in ‘local problems’, there are two objective reasons not to do so. First of all, one should not sneak behind someone’s back. Complaints should be submitted directly to the person involved, true to the aim, as researchers are trained to do. Secondly, a letter has to be read to have a chance to get the intended effect. Publication in the journal in question therefore is most obvious and especially for Kuttila and co-workers, the best guarantee to get the message at all.

My issue is illustrated by the mentioned paper. In my opinion, the Kuttila paper is an example of a paper in which the referred literature is selectively and erroneously applied whilst inclusion of almost all quoted papers is neither explained nor motivated. Moreover, internationally respected subject-related papers from Journal of Dental Research 3.4 are not included. Moreover, their paper introduces ‘new’ suggestions without discussing similar suggestions published previously. The most striking is that ‘the suggestion for terminology’ has already become ‘the truth’ and announced and applied as a new standard in the Kuttila papers 5,6.

So far, letters to the Editor from abroad have never appeared in Acta. The international forum is not invited or stimulated to do so. I sincerely hope that this comment contributes to a reconsideration of the policy of Acta Odontologica Scandinavica so that the international audience in the future will be invited to discuss papers in Acta by means of letters to the Editor or another discussion section or facility in the journal.

ROBERT J. A. M. DE KANTER
Dental School, University of Nijmegen
Box 9101
NL-6500 HB Nijmegen
The Netherlands

IN RESPONSE: Dr. De Kanter’s concern about the policy of Acta Odontologica Scandinavica to only accept contributions from Scandinavian authors and others working at Scandinavian institutions is understandable in a world with rapidly increasing internationalization. However, this is in accordance with the bylaws of the Acta Odontologica Scandinavica Foundation, established more than 50 years ago. The bylaws have been marginally changed during these years, but the main point, that the journal strives to make dental research in Scandinavia known to an international forum and therefore limits contributions, has remained intact. At the last Foundation meeting in August 1997, a committee was set up to work on a revision of the bylaws, and the proposal will be discussed at the next Foundation meeting in 1998.

Dr. De Kanter writes that letters to the editor ‘from abroad’ never appeared in Acta. This is not true—the last time it happened was in issue 6, 1996. Since we follow the recommendations of the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (Vancouver Group) as much as possible, it is a matter of course that we publish letters to the Editor when such are submitted, also from international readers, even though a correspondence column has not been a regular feature of the journal.

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Editor

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IN RESPONSE: We had carefully read the papers mentioned by Robert J. A. M. De Kanter when preparing our article. In accordance with our title, we wanted to suggest some new concepts. A second reading of the papers mentioned in De Kanter’s letter also failed to disclose aspects relevant to our concepts ‘active’, ‘passive’, and ‘no treatment need’. We still maintain that our classification system is new and not suggested earlier by De Kanter or someone else. In our paper we included De Kanter’s paper ‘Demand and need’ as Reference 19 (1) because it discusses the same topic as our paper. The other papers mentioned in De Kanter’s letter discuss prevalence. The reason for exclusion of these papers was simply that they add no new aspects to the treatment need discussion already presented by De Kanter in the paper we referred to.

We disagree with De Kanter on the nature of scientific inquiry. What he argues to be a standard or ‘truth’ accepted by us is in reality a suggestion for classification whose applicability is critically tested in the later papers.

MARIJANA KUTTILA
YRSA LE BELL
PENTTI ALALEN
Institute of Dentistry
University of Turku
Turku, Finland

Reference