The Last Volume of the First Half Century

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This month marks the 50th anniversary of The Society of Thoracic Surgeons (STS), but the 49th anniversary of The Annals of Thoracic Surgery. Bound volumes of The Annals will be numbered “97” and “98” in 2014 for two reasons: Volumes 1 and 2 each covered a year and journal volumes are compiled at the end of the year, not the beginning. Thus chapter 4 in the accompanying supplement covers the years 1964 through June 2013. An up-to-date table of metrics (Table 1 in the supplement chapter) will appear for the 50th anniversary of The Annals, which occurs December 31, 2014, in the June 2015 issue. Meanwhile changes are planned.

Since the first issue in January 1964, The Annals has grown rapidly to keep pace with the torrid growth and evolution of cardiac and thoracic surgery. The number of original scientific articles submitted to The Annals in 2013 will probably exceed 1,600 manuscripts, and the total for all categories of submissions will likely be between 3,800 and 3,900 articles. Moreover, the sophistication and diversity of subject matter within these papers, which encompasses a gigantic menu of our accumulated knowledge and operative skills, exceeds the cerebral capacity of a single editor.

In October 2011, the STS Board of Directors authorized appointments of 7 “deputy editors” to participate and improve the review process. For the past year Verdi DiSesa, Mark Ferguson, Tom MacGillivray, and Gus Mavroudis have appointed reviewers, evaluated reviews, and made decisions for approximately half of the original scientific articles submitted. The editor carefully reviews each decision and accepts full responsibility for the process and decision, but the expertise and knowledge of the deputy editors far exceeds that of the editor. Interestingly, the acceptance, rejection, and revision rates of the deputy editors varies less than 2% from that of the editor, who manages slightly less than half of the submitted original scientific articles. The superior knowledge and expertise of the deputy editors provides an immeasurable improvement in the quality of reviewers, reviews, and ultimately, the quality of the published papers.

Colleen Koch now manages continuing medical education (CME) with a new team of CME writers: John Kern (adult cardiac), Kirk Kanter (congenital cardiac), Kemp Kernstine (general thoracic), and Feroze Mahmood (anesthesia). Beginning in June 2013, CME exercises are now posted on Elsevier’s Health Advance platform along with the individual credits earned by each participant. The decision to not post journals on CTSNet prompted the move, but participant subscribers will find that nothing else has changed except the Web address: www.annalsthoracicsurgery.org/cme/home.

John Odell now manages the review process and decision for feature articles (case reports, how-to-do-it, and image articles). The editorial office receives 120 to 140 of these articles each month. Lastly, Doug Mathisen has taken the position of deputy editor for special articles, reviews, guidelines, priority reports, presidential addresses, and surgical heritage articles. Doug chooses the reviewers, but recommendations and decisions are made with the editor’s active participation.

Registration at The Annals Web site began January 1, 2003, and soon was accompanied by a list of 360 to 375 keywords designed to identify the subject matter of submitted manuscripts and also the interests and expertise of each registrant. Authors and prospective reviewers use the same list of keywords. Matching keywords common to both manuscript and registrant simplified selection of reviewers and greatly extended the pool of qualified reviewers for each paper. The editor routinely invited 2 to 5 (mean of about 3) qualified reviewers, one of whom was an editorial board member, to review original scientific articles. Hopefully, this improved the quality of the reviews and provided authors with useful guidance to improve their revisions and new submissions. Although the list of keywords is updated each January, the 18,495 registrants at the Web site have not been systematically updated. It is now time to do so.

During the period January 1 to June 30, 2014, every registrant is invited to reregister at The Annals’ Web site: www.atseditorialoffice.org. Contact information should be confirmed or updated even if none of this information has changed. Each registrant is also invited to choose up to 50 “keywords” from the current (2014) list that best describe their interests and expertise. Choosing less than 50 is fine, but choosing more than 50 is disingenuous, because no one is truly expert in more than 14% of the accumulated knowledge germane to cardiothoracic surgery. Thus, only the first 50 keywords that you use to describe your expertise will be entered. Please choose carefully and wisely.

Although not yet 50, The Annals reflects the strength and vigor of our profession and the interests, issues, and business of the society it serves. The STS has “earned its spurs,” so let’s have a blast in Orlando.