

Bitter pills?

John Hughes

Pharmacology Communications. Editors-in-chief N. G. Bowery and R. R. Ruffolo Jr. *Harwood Academic*. 4/yr. \$242 (institutional); \$95, £63 (personal).

Pharmaceutical and Pharmacological Letters. Editors P. Dominiak et al. *Springer*. 6/yr. DM360, \$225.50.

In a world of sound bites and photo opportunities there is a definite attraction for a scientist in being able to publish short papers rapidly in a glossy printed format. Both of these new journals have the similar and rather ambitious aims of covering all of pharmacology and therapeutic research. The editors-in-chief of *Pharmacology Communications* lament the trend towards specialist journals and hope their journal will reverse the fashion, a forlorn hope I fear, because most scientists have neither the time nor inclination to wade through the pot-pourri of articles appearing in these journals.

Once upon a time, pharmacology was an appendage of pharmaceutical research, but now professional pharmacologists practising in what is a mainstream subject are hardly likely to be enthusiastic about encapsulation technology or the composition of excipients, however worthy the research. In truth, the market for general interest journals was long ago captured by *Nature*, *Science* and the excellent Elsevier *Trends* series for reviews. Scientists will read outside their area if the material is sufficiently compelling and authoritative, but this is true for only a small core of general interest journals.

What then might these journals achieve in the way of rapid publication of articles containing sound but limited data? *Pharmacology Communications* is on stronger ground here because virtually everyone has experienced the pain of rejection couched in the general terms of "worthy but requires further experiments/analysis/alternative approaches. . .". Most journals of pharmacology offer rapid publication of short articles of immediate interest and I suspect that these two journals will find it difficult to compete in this area. The problem is that although most of the articles in these journals are of reasonable scientific quality, one is left feeling undernourished — too much bread and not enough meat. There is a fallacy, of course, in the assumption that length is somehow related to the scientific acceptability of a particular study. *Pharmacology Communications* recommends that articles should not exceed 2,000 words, with no apparent limit on figures or tables, whereas *Pharmaceutical and Pharmacological Letters* enjoins authors not to exceed four pages of roughly 1,300 words a page.

There are significant differences between these two journals. *Pharmacology Communications* has an impressive international board of associate editors and editors, and papers can be submitted to the editors-in-chief or to associate editors. Articles can be submitted on disk and the journal format is bright and glossy and the instructions to authors are clear and concise. *Pharmaceutical and Pharmacological Letters* has a small but distinguished board of editors, and papers in camera-ready format should be submitted to the managing editor. The camera-ready format gives an uneven look to the journal.

The contributors to these journals highlight their differences. *Pharmaceutical and Pharmacological Letters* is almost entirely composed of articles from academic departments and institutes with a strong bias towards pharmaceuticals and medicinal chemistry. About 40 per cent of the articles in *Pharmacology Communications* are from the pharmaceutical industry with one company, not unrelated to one of the editors-in-chief, supplying the bulk of these articles. The journals will fulfil a need simply because there is a seemingly inexhaustible number of authors seeking a home for their scientific orphans, but I doubt that the publications are destined to become important source journals in pharmacology or pharmaceuticals. □

John Hughes is in the Parke-Davis Neuroscience Research Centre, Addenbrookes Hospital Site, Hills Road, Cambridge CB2 2QB, UK.

Seeing the light

Richard J. Cherry

Journal of Fluorescence Editor-in-chief Joseph R. Lakowicz. *Plenum*. 4/yr. USA and Canada \$175, elsewhere \$205 (institutional); USA and Canada \$40, elsewhere \$47 (personal).

FLUORESCENCE long ago escaped from the laboratories of physicists and chemists into the hands of biochemists and cell biologists, ever eager to find new laboratory tools. The apparently ever-growing application of fluorescence in the biological sciences is evident in the range of fluorophores offered by the leading supplier. Although overshadowed in quantity by biological applications, there is also still a large interest in fluorescence in the fields of chemistry and photophysics as well as optical sensing.

Unlike other spectroscopic techniques, such as magnetic resonance, there has until now been no specialist journal for fluorescence. *Journal of Fluorescence* thus clearly fills a gap. The stated scope of the new journal is something of a catch-all,

but the emphasis is clearly on advances in technique, theory and data analysis. It is in these areas that it is particularly appropriate to provide a focus for papers that have previously been dispersed in the literature. In the early issues, about a half of the contributions fall into these categories, whereas the ratio of biological to chemical applications is about 3 to 1.

Journal of Fluorescence has a distinguished editorial board; several members have contributed to the early issues and have set a good standard. The quality of production is pleasing, and the journal is reasonably good value for money. Given that the pace of innovation in fluorescence shows no sign of diminishing, it has a good chance of success. □

Richard J. Cherry is in the Department of Chemistry and Biological Chemistry, University of Essex, Wivenhoe Park, Colchester CO4 3SQ, UK.

Signals galore

Michael J. Berridge

Biological Signals. Editors-in-chief S. F. Pang, T. Fujita and P. A. Ward. *Karger*. 6/yr. SFr75, \$250 (institutional); SFr187.50, \$125 (personal).

THE Institute for Scientific Information has identified cell signalling as one of the largest research fields in modern biology. With so much activity going on, there have been rich pickings for scientific publishers ever ready to exploit any new opportunity. A cursory glance through *Current Contents* reveals a plethora of journals covering all aspects of signalling. Even though Karger has already spawned such titles as *Neuroendocrinology* and *Hormone Research*, it has now produced another addition to the family. It is not immediately apparent whether the new member is necessary: it seems to cover much the same area as its siblings.

The intention is for *Biological Signals* to be the repository for papers on the "production, transmission, recognition, processing, modification, and effect of biological signals". This is certainly an ambitious undertaking because it covers the whole field of cell signalling. Many other journals in this field have adopted the opposite strategy of publishing papers on specific signals, such as calcium (*Cell Calcium*), second messengers (*Second Messengers and Phosphoproteins*), steroids (*Steroids*), amines (*Biogenic amines*) and arachidonic acid metabolites (*Prostaglandins*). By opting for a much more general coverage, *Biological Signals* will be able to adapt to new trends and this may be one of its strengths. Its