Six months ago we acknowledged the help of many thousands of our reviewers who helped us with the editorial decision process over the last 5 years [1]. The aim of editors is two-fold: they wish to make fair decisions, but they also want to select the best work from the submitted material in order to increase the esteem of their journal which is to a large extent reflected by its impact factor. Moreover, editors have to deal with page limitations. The task of editors is therefore not easy, also because reviewers in fact relatively seldomly recommend to reject a paper [2].

Reviewer’s reports are in general constructive and aim at improvement of a manuscript and not at its rejection. Therefore the high rejection rates of leading journals are primarily based on priority considerations [2–4].

1. Peer review

Research of peer review is a young science with its own world congress [5–7] linked to the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME). The review process is in general anonymous and the pros and cons of this have been debated in the past in this journal [8,9] with comments from several experts [10]. The outcome of a survey amongst both authors and reviewers was that the majority of both groups voted for continuation of anonymity. One important other incentive for editors to follow such advice is that about half of the reviewers stated that disclosure of their names would cause them to refuse to review or at least to be more reluctant to do so in the future [8]. Obviously, editors cannot afford such a loss of expertise, if they aim at peer review of the large majority of the submitted material. Although the quality of the review process would probably benefit from disclosure of the identity of the reviewers [9,11], logistic reasons prevent such a policy.

2. Geographical aspects of submissions, publications, reviewers and reviewer’s reports

With the above information in hand one may wonder who should be selected as a reviewer. In the April 2000 issue we already noted [1] that the general idea that older more experienced individuals might be better in putting research in perspective [12,13], although younger reviewers might be better in more detailed technical knowledge, is not supported by facts [11]. Younger reviewers performed better in both aspects. Therefore we adopted as a policy to ask individuals to act as a reviewer as soon as they have a paper accepted in the journal [1]. Fig. 1 shows the geographical distribution of original manuscripts submitted and published between January 1997 and December 1999, as well as that of available reviewers at the end of 1999 and that of the frequency by which the advice of those reviewers for all submitted original manuscripts was sought between October 1997 and December 1999. Nine countries (the G7 countries plus Australia and the Netherlands) made up together 79.3% of all submitted manuscripts and 82.6% of all published manuscripts. The percentage of reviewers from those countries was by and large the same as the percentage of publications, the
exception being the USA. We emphasized in previous editorials that the geographical distribution of accepted manuscripts is not equal to that of submitted manuscripts [14–18].

3. Do high reviewer's ratings predict future citations?

Fig. 2 shows the effect of reducing the contents of *Cardiovascular Research* in an artificial away. The con-
The priority assigned by reviewers to a manuscript has a positive predictive power in terms of future citation power, but only if the reviewers agree.

Another editorial policy with no other decision criterion than reviewer’s priority potentially may increase the impact factor, but by no more than 40%. The last official impact factor of 1998 was 2.99 and after draconic interventions as described above it could not have increased above 4.20.

The first observation is of interest for all future authors, reviewers, editors as well as publishers, because it demonstrates that there might still be a role for peer review — despite its shortcomings [19–24] — when in the future, paper journals have ceased to exist and when electronic publishing has obliterated the problem of page limitations.

The second observation is of interest for our readers and prospective authors. It shows that we can only improve the position of our journal during the next years if they send us their very best work.

References