FIFTY YEARS AND COUNTING

EDITORIAL:

Did you notice the volume number of this issue... Volume 50. A half-century. Can it be? Undeniably, yes. I was 13 when my predecessor, Harker Rhodes, produced a mimeographed compilation of meeting notes that would transition into the Journal of the American Veterinary Radiology Society, the precursor of today’s journal. Most of you weren’t even alive when the journal was launched. Who knew it would last 50 years.

Like holidays, bookmarks in time are a cause for reflection. Entrance into the journal’s 50th year has given me cause to think about its evolution. Over these 50 years, the journal has transformed significantly through format and title change, editorial change, publisher change, production change, and, most importantly, content change. Some of these changes were planned, some unexpected, and others came about as a result of practice revolutions or new modalities coming upon the scene. Most of these changes have resulted in a better journal.

An unexpected change, many years ago, was notification from our publisher that they were “pulling the plug” on the journal. This was not totally unexpected given the economic upheaval in the publishing business at time, with one gobbling up another as revenues declined. But, it did catch me off guard as it came just one day after the same publisher had said, “don’t worry, we’re not going to pull the plug”! With some fast action we were able to organize self-publishing, which transpired without interruption in the production schedule. I breathed a sigh of relief, having feared that we were going to bury our dear blue friend on my watch. The College published the Journal successfully for a number of years until we were fortunate enough to join the Wiley Blackwell family of veterinary journals.

With regard to practice revolutions, the love affair between veterinary radiologists and sound waves affected the journal in many ways. Soaring interest in ultrasonography led to increased submission of related papers. Veterinary radiologists are very ingenious and no body part or species escaped insonation. Primarily to recognize this paradigm shift, but I think also to lay claim to the modality, we changed the journal’s title from Veterinary Radiology to Veterinary Radiology & Ultrasound. This seemed like a good decision, one aimed at redefining the journal as the logical repository for novel ultrasonographic findings. But, wouldn’t this have happened anyway? With the notable exception of echocardiography, radiologists have been and likely always will be the driving force behind veterinary ultrasonography. Radiologists do the bulk of clinical ultrasonography, and are the group that has contributed most to the intellectual growth of the modality. Was a title change really needed? Recently, I sense a redirection in terms of what’s hot. Though I’ve not done an up to date accounting of the types of papers submitted, I perceive a relative decline in the number of ultrasonography papers. This has caused me to think a lot about how flocking some things are; a case in point, the disappearance of red goggles*. Soon the darkroom will be a thing of the past... In retrospect, I wish we would have left the title well enough alone. Didn’t Veterinary Radiology capture it all? Journal titles cannot change with the wind to reflect the modality de jour. Journals develop an identity that is usually best left alone. Journals must stay true to their roots and our roots are in “radiology”. I wonder if the American College of Radiology ever considered a title change for their grey journal. Chances are they did and made the right decision. So far, there has not been an issue of Veterinary Radiology & Ultrasound without an ultrasound paper. Looking ahead, I think it’s not whether this will happen, but when and how often. What do we do then?

One might argue, and I would concur, that CT and MRI are really the modalities that have revolutionized veterinary imaging. I also think these are the modalities that hold promise for bringing about the most change in the future, which must begin to encompass functional imaging. Single slice CT scanners are already on the way out, being replaced by multidetector machines, and many veterinary teaching hospitals and specialty practices have immediate access to high field MRI. CT imaging has revolutionized our understanding of nasal and thoracic disease, and will soon have an impact in the abdomen, perhaps challenging ultrasound for the first time. CT imaging also revolutionized radiation oncology, with most patients having their treatment planned on the basis of CT images. Radiologists have not yet taken ownership of MRI, mainly because the greatest application has been in neuroimaging. Just look at the neuroimaging papers in the journal, the principal author is rarely a radiologist. Our deficiencies in neuroanatomy and in understanding the association between “the white spot” and neurologic derangements have, I believe, prevented most radiologists from assuming leadership positions in neuroimaging. This is a flaw in radiology training that needs attention. There are many exciting opportunities for radiologists and neurologists to work together to advance MRI of neural

*Red goggles were first produced in the early 1900s. They were worn prior to performing fluoroscopy to dark adapt the eyes while still being able to see. The alternative was waiting 15–20 minutes in a completely dark room. Image intensifiers that subsequently came along increased image brightness such that fluoroscopy no longer had to be performed in complete darkness and dark adaptation became unnecessary. And, yes, Don Barber and I wore them proudly during our training at Colorado State University. How silly we looked.
disease but this will require enhancement of radiologist training in basic neurology.

Returning to the journal itself, another pivotal milestone was outreach by the ACVR to the European imaging groups, and the IVRA. Inclusion of representatives of those organizations on the board of Associate Editors added a real international flavor to the journal. Over 50% of papers in the journal originate from outside of the United States. I believe the journal is now the world’s resource for cutting-edge information relating to veterinary radiology. This outreach has also given radiologists worldwide a stake in the journal that has engendered loyalty and enhanced communication.

On the down side, I do sense that the inertia behind imaging inquisitiveness has shifted from the United States to imaging strongholds in other countries. I am disappointed in the disproportionate number of young bright American radiologists who choose private practice over an academic career, a brain drain in the truest sense. Though growth of specialized veterinary medicine in private practice has been a boon for the pet owning public, I see the exodus of most radiology trainees into private practice as a serious problem that is not garnering the attention it deserves. Will it take a crisis to necessitate a pendulum shift? What if we fall into a deep and lasting recession? What if residency training programs diminish in quality and quantity because of attrition of academic radiologists? Will such high-impact events lead to a resurgence of interest for academic radiology positions? Why aren’t the real advantages of academic radiology (intellectual stimulation, variety, job security, travel, paid vacation) more appreciated by young radiologists? I think the brain drain has more potential to negatively impact the specialty than any other that is being addressed.

Enough gloom and doom. It is appropriate that with entrance into our 50th year we expand the annual page budget from 624 to 720 pages. This expansion was brought on by increased submission of high quality work that deserves rapid publication. It is a testimony to the foresight of the ACVR and of Wiley Blackwell that this increase could be implemented. But, with growth comes responsibility. We have seen our Impact Factor increase steadily over the past few years. With more journal pages, we will have to focus on even higher quality material, both from authorship and editorship perspectives, if we are to continue to enjoy the respect garnered from a healthy Impact Factor. Although indices such as the Impact Factor are fraught with problems, quantification of productivity and academic benchmarks necessitate consideration of these sometimes unrealistic meters.

I won’t go on, except to express thanks to those who have supported the journal in so many ways. I will always remember Harker Rhodes, crouched at his desk, red pen in hand, Fresca nearby, having his way with some budding radiologist’s paper. His passion kept the journal alive though the trials and tribulations of his own time, which were generally more daunting than ones I have faced. He inspired me and I tried to emulate him as best I could. The red pen company knows that in some regards he was successful, though “track-changes” rules the day. Dozens of busy radiologists have taken time to serve as Associate Editors; with each reviewing more than a handful of papers every year. The Associate Editors also spend countless hours assessing manuscripts considered for the Resident Author Award. This year there were a record 28 manuscripts considered. Hundreds of veterinarians worldwide provide manuscript critique that ultimately leads to the highest quality journal possible; many of these same veterinarians also supply the manuscripts themselves, obviously the most important component. Rick Widmer, my classmate, fellow radiologist and good friend, has been my sounding board for many years. He influences my thinking about the profession, which affects my philosophy regarding the journal. Rick was once an Associate Editor and I still call upon him for his cogent reviews. Lucinda Ayres works mostly behind the scenes. Lucinda also saw Harker’s labor of love first hand and I think this affected her as well as it did me. She takes care of day to day problems and keeps the journal on the right track; the journal could not survive without her input. There are many others, too numerous to mention individually, ACVR Presidents, Council members, and others, who have been instrumental in helping the journal subsist and grow.

Fifty years. How can it be? Just think of the mind-boggling things that have influenced humanity during the journal’s lifetime . . . . the human genome, the computer, the Beatles, 9/11, and on and on. Time has been good for the journal. It is a better medium, a highly polished resource, something we can be proud of. But, as time marches on, initiatives change. It will be a challenge for the journal to grow but as long as there are curious radiologists throughout the world, and animals loved by their humans, I think there will be novel imaging-based material worthy of dissemination. So, here’s to us . . . a tip of the hat to the past but mostly a view toward the unimaginable things that will transpire in the next 50 years.

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