EDITORIAL

Research methods and The Bone & Joint Journal

The Journal of Bone & Joint Surgery (British Volume) had a long and justified reputation for delivering the latest musculoskeletal research in a well-written and easily digestible format. Readers want and deserve clear and concise reporting of research findings and, in particular, how these will inform their clinical practice. In order to deliver clinical research in a palatable form, no matter what the subject, or country of origin, each paper undergoes a lengthy editing process. The Bone & Joint Journal will continue this tradition, which is fundamental to its position as one of the foremost orthopaedic journals in the world.

Alongside this emphasis on readability, The Bone & Joint Journal will also be working hard to improve the reporting of research methodology. It is vital that the research reported in the Journal is cited elsewhere and used in evidence-synthesis and, increasingly, in the development of clinical guidelines. Like it or not, the United Kingdom's National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence,1 and equivalent international institutions, play a major part in the commissioning of clinical services. Research published in The Bone & Joint Journal must inform the decisions made by these bodies. It must have a clear voice.

In order to maximise the chances of being heard, the Journal should clearly conform to high standards of research methodology and, just as importantly, the highest standards of reporting of these methods. Researchers in trauma and orthopaedic surgery and related areas have often been accused – with some justification if one is honest – of asking important questions about clinical practice but failing to convince policy makers that the questions have been answered. This is all too often because of inadequate descriptions of the research methodology; researchers have large amounts of information and the enthusiasm to collect it but do not always present their findings in the best light.

The Bone & Joint Journal will be asking for your help in improving the quality of reporting within its pages. However, please do not be overly concerned. The Journal will not be asking you to take courses in advanced statistical design or health economic evaluation. It will simply be asking you to follow some generic reporting guidelines.2 For example, if you are reporting a randomised clinical trial we will ask you to use the CONsolidated Standards of Reporting Clinical Trials (CONSORT) statement3 as a basis for your manuscript. Please do not worry if you have not conformed to all of these standards – many will not be appropriate to your research question – but thinking about these issues as you design and write it up your trial will improve your paper and hence your chances of changing clinical practice.

The Journal has established an international group to advise on research methodology and reporting. This group has expertise in epidemiology, clinical trials, statistics and evidence synthesis, and will help with this transition to even better publications. Its members will also be advising the Journal on issues of research governance. What does this mean? In practice, a number of things might occur. For example, the group may, on occasion, ask to independently verify an author’s data. This may mean repeating an analysis, but more likely asking authors to provide the raw data from their experiments, or letters confirming institutional approval. Authors should not be offended. It is in everyone’s interests to check and recheck the accuracy of each piece of information published in The Bone & Joint Journal so that this renowned publication can hold its own in the forefront of orthopaedic publishing. From time to time the Research Methods Group will also be providing articles about specific aspects of research methodology and reporting. These will briefly explore common areas of methodological importance or topical issues of reporting and publication.
These are exciting times for *The Bone & Joint Journal*. It will be maintaining its focus as an easy-to-read publication, that readers can use to inform their own clinical practice. At the same time, the Journal will be working hard to further improve the quality of reporting of the excellent studies submitted by researchers throughout the world.

**References**