

## Introduction to Symposium on the Primary Journal\*

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The problems of the primary journal are like the familiar complaint about the weather: everybody talks about them, but nobody does anything about them. Yet the lack of a solution to the problem is not matched by any lack of publicity on the subject. On the contrary, reams have been written about journals, their functions and dysfunctions. The journal system of disseminating information has been criticized for inefficiency and expense; it has been indicted as a major factor in the information explosion. Many information experts, particularly those who deal in hardware, have predicted the eventual death of the journal system and its replacement by mechanized forms.

But for a dying institution, the primary journal continues to show amazing signs of life, and even growth. New journals announce their publication and promptly attract subscribers; established journals continue to grow and some of them subdivide into smaller, more specialized units, each of which has its own audience. Even the page charge has failed to halt the trend. The primary journal is playing out a long and lively deathbed scene.

In many discussions of journals, pro and con, the person most concerned—the man at the bench—is virtually ignored. The primary journal is fundamentally produced by and for him; yet he is seldom consulted on the subject. Is he ready to abandon the journal, or does he still need it, although in an improved form? Does the journal fulfill certain functions for him beyond the obvious one of disseminating information?

The question is not limited to chemists and the American Chemical Society alone. All areas of science are concerned with the same dilemma, and all major scientific

organizations are engaged in the same search for a solution. Since one phase of solving any problem is to identify the issues, the Division of Chemical Literature invited a number of experts in the field of scientific information to discuss the primary journal, its strengths and weaknesses, its past, present, and possible future. Contributors to the symposium represent chemistry, physics, psychology, medical sciences, and administration, with the viewpoints of the professional societies, the academic world, and the government. Topics include the primary journal's history, its financial and management difficulties, its social and psychological functions as seen by its contributors and users, its relationship with secondary publications, alternatives to it, and its possible future as an institution.

Some valuable new insights are offered in this compilation. Even the more familiar accounts are of value because of the way in which they are discussed and the context in which they are offered. At last we are beginning to see the problem as a whole, rather than in fragments, and it may become possible to take corrective action. Any proposal for drastic reform or big-scale alternative must be evaluated in terms of the considerations presented in this symposium. What needs has the journal filled in the past, and what are its deficiencies in the present? Will another system fill those same needs and correct those very deficiencies? If not, perhaps we should go slowly until we find one that can do so. What are the good features of journals? Why have they been supported so strongly for so long? Will a new system receive the same support? If the answer is no, regardless of its apparent efficiency, the cure may be worse than the disease.

The following papers are intended to help authors and users of journals decide these questions for themselves.

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