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EDITORIAL

Diagnostics in the Time of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

Challenges and Opportunities

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Welcome to a new year and congratulations on surviving 2020. The demands for disease identification during this pandemic have brought an unprecedented focus on clinical laboratory diagnostic testing. Despite early shared data about the viral sequence, the rapid pace of changing knowledge about coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) prevalence, transmission, symptoms, pathology, test implementation, and potential treatment options increased awareness around the globe of the value of professional communication and collaborations. Mistakes were many and assigned to various sectors. Faulty test kits, restrictions of testing sites, limited clinical criteria to define patients eligible to receive testing, conflicting messages from health professionals and government policy makers, regulatory restrictions, compromised supply chains, and garbled public health messaging affected some countries more than others. These complexities produced scientific knowledge gaps about how to best combat the spread of the virus and protect the most vulnerable populations. The *Journal of Molecular Diagnostics (JMD)* provided insights from many of our professional colleagues. Dr. Karen Kaul¹ proposed a future framework for collaboration and oversight for better laboratory preparedness during a pandemic. Lefferts et al² described the experiences of the Dartmouth group for implementation of the Emergency Use Authorization requirements for diagnostic laboratory-developed procedures as initially specified by the US Food and Drug Administration. The leadership of the Association for Molecular Pathology (AMP) Infectious Disease Subdivision documented their perspectives about the multiple challenges for molecular diagnostic laboratories in effective responses to testing for severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2).³ The *Journal* began publishing multiple reports of emerging technologies for detection of SARS-CoV-2 in the June issue,^{4–6} and the January issue features three new articles related to COVID-19 detection.^{7–9} The editorial office

continues to process new COVID-19 manuscripts through the peer review and revision process and looks forward to sharing the lessons, expertise, insights, and encouragement through published reports and social media platforms.

Distributing timely information, knowledge, and experiences to our global molecular diagnostics community through *JMD* during this pandemic tested our editorial processes. Fortunately, the production of the journal was largely unaffected. Journal staff quickly adapted to successfully manage all journal operations remotely. Editors responded to the increased urgency for decisions affecting submissions focused on SARS-CoV-2 testing. The biggest challenge for rapid publishing was finding subject matter experts to provide timely peer reviews at a time when many experts were overwhelmed with laboratory services supporting care of patients with suspected COVID-19. Many of the submitted articles in *JMD* for 2020 related to SARS-CoV-2, but our other specialty areas of molecular diagnostics for cancer and inherited disorder were also well represented.

One year ago, *JMD* transitioned to a monthly publishing format. Initial concerns about having sufficient articles for each issue proved to be unwarranted as both new submission numbers as well as the number of accepted articles in 2020 significantly surpassed the totals from 2019. The *JMD* impact factor realized a significant increase last summer, increasing to 5.552 (from 4.426). In 2020, Elsevier initiated publication discounts for AMP members publishing in *JMD*. These include page charges of \$75 for AMP members and \$100 for

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nonmembers plus Open Access charges of \$2400 and \$3000 for AMP members and nonmembers, respectively. We hope that these incentives, in addition to the reduced time intervals between acceptance and print publication, will encourage AMP members to send their manuscripts to *JMD*.

In 2020, *JMD* also began a partnership with the newly structured AMP Publications Committee to replace the previous Joint Journal Oversight Committee. *JMD* editorial staff members contribute to the monthly publications committee conference calls. They collaborated to generate, distribute, and analyze data from a survey of AMP members to ascertain how *JMD* serves their professional needs. An in-depth report of the findings has been shared with the AMP leadership and the *JMD* Editorial Board to guide future developments for journal strategies, topics, and formats.

While the world remains hopeful that safe and effective vaccines for SARS-CoV-2 will soon be available, future disease outbreaks will require our continued focus and action. The opportunities to demonstrate the strength and value of clinical laboratories, public health measures, and science itself should not be ignored. Leadership and responsible policy must be based in scientific and medical knowledge but tempered with reliable communication and compassionate support of at-risk populations. *JMD* will strive to publish high-quality studies in molecular medicine, diagnostic technologies, and professional practices guidance, and continue to disseminate timely peer-reviewed articles to combat the ongoing pandemic.

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