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Uncertainty and Optimism



It would be wonderful if I could introduce the January 2021 inaugural issue of Volume 141 of the *Journal of Investigative Dermatology (JID)* with an unreservedly upbeat editorial that predicted health, success, prosperity, and happiness for all *JID* readers and citizens of the world at large, but (as you know) I cannot. Instead, I begin the year acknowledging that most of us are experiencing levels of uncertainty that relate to many aspects of our personal and professional lives and that even seniors like me have never experienced uncertainty quite like this.

I devote most of my time and effort to being editor of the *JID*, and this is my primary professional activity. It should follow then that most of my angst would result from challenges or activities that are *JID* related. Perhaps this was true before coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), but I honestly cannot remember whether this was the case. I currently spend a lot of time worrying about the safety and well-being of my family, coworkers, and friends; the acute and chronic effects of COVID-19 on all who are afflicted; the anticipated post-COVID-19 hangover that will include lasting effects on local, regional, national, and international economies; healthcare-related (and other) disparities; climate change; political polarization and the potential for unrest; and (not surprisingly) the outcome of elections. I actually spend very little time these days worrying about the *JID*.

Notice that I also do not worry about my employment or my compensation, my risk of employment-associated coronavirus exposure, my access to health care, or competing for grant funds to support a research effort. Because of my personal circumstances, these concerns just do not relate to me at present. In some ways, I feel like an observer who is somewhat insulated from untoward occurrences related to the pandemic rather than someone who is immersed in it. If I have significant anxiety despite my many advantages, how are individuals who are less fortunate dealing with their circumstances? Perhaps in these difficult times, it would be helpful for all of us to look forward with optimism, even if that optimism is guarded.

I look forward to 2021 as a year that features less uncertainty and hopefully much less. By the time you read this, the results of the United States national election will be known. Hopefully, the

cacophony of discord that has become almost continuous will be replaced by civil discourse emphasizing the opinions of experts and other thoughtful individuals, and this dialog will result in effective policies that relate to COVID-19 and other pressing issues. Perhaps the collective angst and political fatigue that have accumulated over the past few years could result in an appetite for bipartisan cooperativity. At present, it is not easy to see how, or if, this can be orchestrated. It is also not easy to see how we will begin to address other overarching issues such as long-standing social and economic disparities and climate change. Believing that, at their cores, people with seemingly disparate backgrounds, opinions, and beliefs are more similar than they are different. I choose to be optimistic. National and perhaps international healing will be required, however. If and when dialogs about difficult issues begin, we must be willing to listen to each other and prepared to compromise. Some of us will need to make sacrifices.

For the *JID*, I can predict with some confidence that 2021 will be business as usual. Despite the pandemic, the calendar year 2020 was notable for increased submissions over the year 2019 and an almost one-point increase in the impact factor (2019 impact factor = 7.193). The editorial office and editorial board continued to function at a high level, and timely production of the journal continued without a hitch throughout the year. Three new social media editors were recruited to the editorial board and a thematic issue on aging has been organized by Thomas Krieg and Bjorn Schumacher (both at the University of Cologne, Germany). Look for its release in early 2021. Johann Gudjonsson (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI) is fully engaged in the coordination of a special issue focused on autoimmunity that will appear in early 2022.

The calendar year 2021 will also feature a virtual annual meeting of the Society of Investigative Dermatology (SID) that will occur in May. A very successful and surprisingly well-attended 2020 SID virtual meeting was organized at almost the last minute. In 2021, we can look forward to a more deliberately planned SID virtual annual meeting with anticipation and genuine excitement. Whether the September 2021 European Society of Dermatological Research meeting in Amsterdam, Netherlands, will be in person is not yet known. Given the wide community spread of the coronavirus in the United States and Europe, it seems unlikely that unrestricted international travel will

EDITORIAL

be possible before one or more vaccines have been developed and deployed. Perhaps we can be more genuinely optimistic about the prospects for a safe and efficacious COVID-19 vaccine than many of the other challenges I have alluded to.

It would not be appropriate to close the book on 2020 without acknowledging the remarkable contributions that physicians and nonphysician healthcare workers, clinical and laboratory scientists, public health experts, selected government officials, and responsible citizens have made in the fight against COVID-19. As a biomedical scientist, I am proud to be a peer of individuals who have made important contributions to the effort on a variety of fronts. History will ultimately celebrate the critical roles that scientific research and scientists will have played in the eventual recovery from the pandemic. Perhaps this black cloud will even have a silver lining. Public awareness of and respect for science and scientists could increase. Additional support for science and scientists could be provided by funding agencies. More young people could aspire to become scientists. The biomedical research enterprise could actually grow and become more vibrant...

The predicted fall and/or winter surge in COVID-19 has begun in Europe and the United States. Additional stresses on healthcare providers, healthcare facilities, and the citizenry are anticipated. Some of us will be affected directly and most of us will be affected in one way or another. Stay safe (and be optimistic).

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author states no conflict of interest.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

In the several weeks since this editorial was drafted, a lot has happened. The popular vote in the United States Presidential election has been counted and certified. A winner has been determined, but the current President has yet to concede that he and his administration will be replaced in January, 2021. The policies and composition of a new Democratic Presidential administration are being rolled out and the Republican majority in the US Senate is at risk. Several companies have announced surprisingly positive initial results of COVID-1 vaccine trials and one vaccine has already been approved for use in the United Kingdom. These encouraging developments are occurring against a backdrop of surges of COVID-19 in Europe and pre-holiday exponential increases in coronavirus infections in the United States. It is hard to imagine that the next few months will be anything other than terribly difficult for front line health care workers, some of whom are undoubtedly *JID* readers and contributors. Kudos to these individuals, and to all of you who support them. Dr. Anthony Fauci is sounding optimistic about intermediate term prospects these days and I think that it would be unwise to disagree with Dr. Fauci. I look forward to a return to normalcy and to seeing many of you soon.