

Correspondence

To the Editor:

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

I write to you on the topic of nationalism in peer-reviewed journal titles, with the premise that a journal title should reflect only the scientific subject matter covered, not national roots. Looking at a title analytically, if it includes the word "Journal", it implies that it represents current transactions; if it mentions "Surgery", it suggests that its content focuses on matters surgical; and by the same token, if it embraces the word "British", one has to infer that works from Britain will predominate. At the risk of precipitating protests and surges of national pride, I pose the general question whether inclusion of *any* country name in the title of a journal has real meaning in today's market. The specific frame of reference for this letter concerns the word "Canadian" in the title of the Canadian Journal of Neurological Sciences and whether its inclusion benefits the journal. No doubt originally compiled more for chauvinistic than geographic reasons, it might be felt by some that the name of a country in a banner head might give a journal an elitist stereotype, fashioned more for and perhaps favoring, authors from that particular land. While the latter is clearly not the case in most instances, one cannot help asking why so many journals still bear in their titles anachronistic terms like country names and even those of noble, long-deceased scientists. While it may be argued that sound reasons existed at the time the journals were founded, I personally think it is time journals were judged less on their cover and more on their content.

While a graduate student in Britain in the 1960's employed by the MRC, I recall submitting a manuscript co-authored with my mentor to a prestigious journal which sported the word "American" in its title. I distinctly remember the discussions and correspondence to Head Office explaining why we had chosen an American journal, why we had not selected a British journal, and why we had decided to publish in a journal which charged for publication, an unusual practice among most European journals. Our reasons were simple and were that this journal was the best platform at that time for our findings, having recently published several papers on the same topic; that there existed at that time no comparable, widely-read journal in Britain; and that to publish in a top journal was a costly business. Our justification prevailed and the paper was submitted, accepted and published but the feeling I came away with was that I had committed something akin to high treason, a feeling which remained with me for quite some time. I also felt that if the journal had had no country name in its title, then we might have experienced less hassle. However, attitudes have changed much in the last quarter century and I have since come to the conclusion that a classification of journals based purely on subject matter is long overdue.

To continue, it is this writer's humble opinion that if a journal *must* have a country name in its banner head then it should be the mouthpiece of a national organization, not a scientific field, and therefore it would be perfectly acceptable for it to give preferential coverage to its followers. Understandably, non-members and foreigners might be somewhat hesitant to submit to such a medium. Fairly or unfairly, with national identity in the title, authors of that nationality might expect to score points with home-based grant awarding agencies and annual progress reports might reflect a

degree of flag waving. Of course, such a logic does not exist in today's climate of international science but to include words reflecting country of origin in a title does bring with it the risk of negative comment. In the cold light of day, the fact remains that in this day and age, competition for good papers is fierce among journals and where one publishes one's work is determined by the subject matter covered and the readership, not nationalistic reasons.

Should we not then remove nationalism from peer-reviewed journal titles? Note how the most simple titles attract the broadest and greatest readership – viz. *Nature* (a 125-year-old British venture) and *Science* (its younger, American cousin). This writer predicts a continued, slow demise of journals bearing geographic regions in their banner heads. Let's not lose sight of the true purpose of the scientific literature, to disseminate information to all colleagues regardless of geographic boundaries. It is every editor's dream to attract top-knotch papers and to broaden constantly the nature of the contributors and the readership. The Canadian Journal of Neurological Sciences is an international journal devoted to the neurological sciences – just that, nothing more. Why stigmatize it with a non-scientific prefix? Let contributors and readers choose the journal for what it covereth, not whence it cometh.

I hope this provocative note stimulates some thought on the subject and perhaps correspondence from your international readership.

*Cedric S. Raine
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REPLY FROM THE EDITOR

Professor Raine has addressed an important matter for the Journal. The Editorial Board has considered a name change in the light of its mission as an international journal of neurology, neurosurgery, and related neurosciences. At its June 15, 1993 meeting, the Editorial Board considered the matter and recommended to the Publications Committee that the name be changed, removing "Canadian". The Publications Committee, at its June 15, 1993 meeting, also recommended that the name be changed. The Publications Committee, representing the four societies of the Canadian Congress of Neurological Sciences, took its recommendation to the societies. The Canadian Neurosurgical Society voted in favour of the name change. The Canadian Association for Child Neurology, and The Canadian Neurological Society did not act on the recommendation of the Editorial Board or the Publications Committee, but wished to further consider the proposal for a name change. The Canadian Society of Clinical Neurophysiologists voted against the proposal in June 1993. The Canadian Neurological Society conducted a survey of its members and the proposal remains under consideration.

The Editorial Board and Publications Committee are aware of the issues raised by Dr. Raine's letter. We earnestly hope that his prediction of "a continued, slow demise of journals bearing geographic names in their banner heads", is not a prescient one. We would welcome further correspondence on the subject from the international readership.

*James A. Sharpe
Editor*