

Complementary Medicine Research: It Is Never Too Late for the Future

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When the founding fathers and mothers of our journal consulted – nearly a quarter of a century ago – about the plans of establishing a new journal with the scope of research in complementary medicine, the field was young in Germany and elsewhere. Dieter Melchart, one of the founders of the journal, had established the Münchner Modell only a few years ago, and I had just finished my PhD thesis. At that time, Markus Wiesenauer had research projects going on in Ulm, and Detlev Thilo-Körner had started his work in Gießen. Peter Matthiessen and his group had just mapped the field of potential interest in researching complementary medicine in Germany for the German government and found some 100 individuals and groups that expressed such interest, should funding become available [1]. As it happened, funding was granted for 2 rather small programs, the second of which was terminated prematurely. Additionally, the Karl und Veronica Carstens-Foundation had just taken up its work and was starting to bring interested researchers together, to fund and seed research, and to enable a new research culture [2]. In Berlin, the chair of naturopathy, given to Malte Bühring, was being installed.

When some researchers met in Basel, in the late Steven Karger's office, to discuss the potential for a new scholarly outlet, a few issues soon became clear: there would be enough interest within the research community, both for reading and for publishing research in the emerging field of complementary medicine in Germany; there would be enough groups wanting to publish and not finding sufficient openness in traditional journals; and there would certainly also be an educated audience, initially mainly the members of the Swiss Society for Medicinal Phytotherapy (SMGP) – to whom we are grateful for their continued interest and support –, but increasingly also libraries and other interested individuals.

So the founders discussed not only whether such a journal should be launched. The latter question was settled rather soon, especially because Steven Karger took the far-reaching and also far-sighted entrepreneurial decision to support such a journal in its initial years with his portfolio of other and stronger medical publications in the mainstream of biomedicine. But the discussion around the title and the language went hot. I was a vigorous supporter, then and now, of an English-language journal, including the title. My argument was simple: as Latin was the Lingua franca of all scholars in medieval Europe, whether they came from Denmark or from Portugal, so is English the Lingua franca of modern-day science, with an increasingly international, globalized culture of research. A German-language journal will only become a niche publication, with little international outreach. I experienced many funny streaks in my life, and some of them are funny-tragic. This is one of them: my ideas come roughly 2 to 3 decades too early. I was outvoted, and the new journal was given a German title, to inform and serve a mainly German readership.

Shortly afterwards, the Office of Alternative Medicine was founded at the National Institutes of Health [3]. And suddenly, the USA emerged as a potential player and huge

market for both information and research. I remember vividly Kim Jobst phoning me in my office asking me to serve on the board of the newly founded 'Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine', which aspired to become the 'Lancet' of research in this field. This was about 2 years after we had had our founding session in Steven Karger's office. Had we, at that time, decided to start off with an English-language journal, ours would have been the first on the market. As it happened, we were among the first, but the series of English-language journals that emerged covered the English-language market. Thus, although we increased the percentage of English-language publications, we had the label of 'German only'. This was mainly due to the fact that our title was irremediably German, no matter what subtitles and numerous editorials, published material, and hard facts had to testify to the contrary.

Now, finally, the brave decision was taken to go really international, not in content – because that has always been international and increasingly in English –, but, importantly, in title to make the public aware of what the journal always was about: high quality research, open and innovative discourse, as well as far reaching and groundbreaking theorizing in the field of complementary medicine research. Mind you: we will not change content, strategy, or procedures. Also, we will continue to publish German-language papers if authors wish so. Our editorial material, such as the Journal Club, newsfeeds, editorials, and other pieces of information, will still be in German, not always, but often. Our change of title signifies to the outside world, to readers who find papers through PubMed or other search engines that it makes actually sense to look more closely, as it is an English-language journal. For the difference is this: a journal with a German title that publishes perhaps 80% of its material in English is still, to the outside world, a (negligible) German-language journal. An English-language journal with an English title that publishes some 20% of its material in German will be taken more seriously. For regular readers, there will be little change. For authors, we offer the chance of higher visibility, once the journal is being perceived as an international one. And ulti-

mately, the readers benefit from an increasing outreach of a journal as well. We will be able to select even more from interesting submissions to create an even more informative and innovative journal. There will be a short trough, when the new title will lead to a delay in the impact factor's echoing the journal's take-up by the community. But eventually, patience pays, we are quite sure. Just looking through some recent publications in our journal, there is indeed scope for international reception [4–9]

Over the years, I have made an interesting observation: I frequently lose sight of some ideas. But once in a while, a letter or a mail reaches me. I discover that what we have been doing 10 or 20 years ago is suddenly being read and picked up. Exactly this is happening now: interest in spirituality and health is increasing, we are invited to contribute to new book projects, and what was insular 10 years ago [10] becomes trendy. I feel, this will also be the case with the new old English title of our journal. It is an idea whose time has finally arrived. I invite all friends of the journals, our readers, our authors, our whole constituency, to share in this new future.

Although we do favor English submissions, you may still send us German-language texts. We are one of the few journals with an active discussion of ongoing topics, be it through letters or through our journal club. Do send in your comments, your diverging views in letters to the editors. We have rarely rejected any of those, unless they were patently silly or wrong. And if you have something important to say that is not a research report but a well-founded opinion and intelligently explained: send an editorial. We will always consider guest editorials, even if they are not invited. We will continue with our series of invited reviews, and we invite you to also suggest topics and authors. And we hope to be able to extend our visibility for authors and readers alike towards those areas of the world where good research is also being conducted, but less known – from Africa to Asia or Latin America. Hence, our new title signals that our original idea has finally come to fruition. It is never too late for the future. Here it comes.

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