



CORRESPONDENCE

Submitting a manuscript

To the Editors:

I feel a little stupid. Recently, I wanted to submit a manuscript to the *European Respiratory Journal (ERJ)*. I went to the *ERJ* website but, rather bafflingly, did not seem to be able to find a reference as to how one could submit. After Googling I found <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/erj>. But there the system immediately defeated me. I had to sign in with a name and password. Not being aware of having the required login details, I tried the Help button by providing my e-mail address, and then enjoyed the bliss of eternal silence. In all fairness, a message actually arrived after about 30 minutes, but I had given up all hope before that time.

Whilst I was waiting, I noticed that there was a facility to register, so that is what I did. But I was immediately stopped in my tracks because the system said it already knew me. I tried the Help button again by submitting my e-mail address, and received a password within a reasonable time, together with my first request. Now, though, the system would not let me submit a manuscript without filling in keywords and the like. I dislike systems that collect unnecessary information about individuals. I only want to submit a manuscript and there is no reason why a system should demand that I provide this information; I might do so if politely asked.

Eventually, the system said that all had been accomplished and that I could now submit a manuscript. Forget it, it just did not work. By this time I had spent an hour or more in futile activities. So, in desperation, I rebooted my computer and tried to establish contact again with Manuscript Central.

I have now submitted the manuscript. It took about 5 hours from the start. I had to copy information that was already provided in the manuscript, such as author names and affiliations. In a number of cases, I did not want to accept what the system forced upon me, such as “Cole, Time J” instead of “Cole, Tim J”, and “rosenthal, mark”, instead of “Rosenthal, Mark”; in addition, the latter’s affiliation was omitted by the software. The system said that I was not allowed to change the information. I also had to copy from the manuscript the abstract text, the legends to the figures, *etc.* In the old days you printed the text, wrote a cover letter, put it in

an envelope with address, licked a stamp and affixed it to the envelope, then put it in a mailbox. Maybe 15 minutes work. Manuscript Central seems to have made this process bureaucracy to the highest level of perfection whilst grinding the process down to the lowest possible pace; this may be a bureaucrat’s delight but as an author, I dislike it. Ironically, if the manuscript is accepted I also have to pay for all my work.

I first used a computer in the 1970s and wrote my first software. I also run four (used to be five) websites, including those *via* which I provide people with free software, and I handle a large number of quite complicated pieces of software on a daily basis. So at first blush one would think that I have enough experience and insight to make submission of a manuscript a breeze. I am never too old to learn but it seems my talents are failing me. It must be Alzheimer’s but I remember from a more lucid period of life that I thought that computers should never run our lives.

I am not writing this to upset anyone as I am convinced that everyone works to offer the best service. Most people would not dare submit a manuscript and then complain about the procedure. But I am a retired person, no longer involved in the rat race, and I have nothing to lose; only science that makes me tick. Of course, the senior author would normally leave this to a junior and never be aware of that junior’s frustrations. Therefore, I thought that it might be worthwhile letting you know what I, acting as a junior author, went through.

P. Quanjer

Dept of Pulmonary Disease and Paediatrics, Erasmus Medical Centre, Rotterdam, the Netherlands.

Correspondence: P. Quanjer, Dept of Pulmonary Disease and Paediatrics, Erasmus Medical Centre, Rotterdam, the Netherlands. E-mail: pquanjer@xs4all.nl

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From the Editors:

We thank Prof. Quanjer for sharing with us the difficulties he had when trying to electronically submit a manuscript at <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/erj>.

We respectfully disagree with Prof. Quanjer in his statement that he would to pay for page charges if his manuscript is

accepted by the *European Respiratory Journal (ERJ)*, as this is clearly not the policy of the Journal.

However, we agree that electronic procedures can be impersonal and sometimes frustrating, especially when websites or our computer, or both, do not react as rapidly as we expect due to hardware bugs, software anomalies, or simply a website’s maintenance.