

Editorial

It is well known that most of the archived literature appearing in the public domain comes from academic institutions. This not surprising since their role is to disseminate as well as create new knowledge. Indeed, institutional reputations are based rather heavily on the extent and quality of knowledge “generated” by them. Numerous “ranking” agencies exist around the world for the sole reason of collecting and analyzing relevant statistics and publish their ranking of national and even global institutions. The merits and demerits of such exercises is not the theme of this editorial, however. It is important to recognize that such systems can be used, misused or abused in the hands of those who are unaware of the implications and validity of the ranking criteria and the inherent high uncertainty levels in them.

I wish to make some observations on the role of a new buzz word in the journal publishing field viz. intellectual property (IP) rights. Universities around the world have become increasingly aware of the potential of commercial exploitation of their research results and other intellectual efforts. Many have indeed benefited from such efforts and such efforts are being intensified globally. The main outcome of this new strategy has been not delay or hold confidential research results which in the old model would have appeared in the public domain for anyone to utilize and extend, if appropriate. The general community benefited from the outcome but the authors and their institutions received little tangible benefit- that too in terms of citations and possibly some degree of recognition. The net result of the need to preserve IP has been to limit dissemination of research results. Of course, this means much R&D effort may be duplicated around the world. This is a tangible cost in terms of human and financial resources needed for research.

It is worth noting that only about one per cent of patents issued are actually used by industry. Care should be exercised in withholding publication since most of the IP generated may not have commercial value at the current state of its development. On the other hand, ideas presented in such work may lead to future developments that may have commercial potential. Of course, it is important that the originators should receive appropriate tangible benefit for their ideas and effort. One limitation of the current IP issue is that developing countries cannot typically afford the high cost of patent protection. They cannot also afford the high cost of R&D. Thus, they are left out of the march to progress and higher quality of living unless developed nations make IP available at a cost they can afford.

I hope readers of this journal convey their thoughts on this important issue by writing to me.

Arun S. Mujumdar
Singapore