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MitoAlmanac archives: http://sigs.nih.gov/mito/Pages/MitoAlmanac.aspx
MIG Website: http://sigs.nih.gov/mito/

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I thank the dozen or so who wrote with comments about the March edition of the MitoAlmanac. All came directly to me at my e-mail address. No one wanted to post them on the MIG site to promote debate. What has happened to scientific discourse? How I long for the debates, nee arguments, of the pioneers of bioenergetics that were conducted in the literature and most importantly, at meetings. How well those discussions/arguments promoted thinking and novel ideas!

Have you been to a meeting lately? Most of the speakers (on a circuit of meetings) have come to be heard, not to listen. Often the lecture extends into question time, cutting off possible debate. At lunch or dinner the speakers sit together and speak to each other, and then they leave early.

What is getting in the way of good honest sharing of ideas, constructive critique of hypotheses and helpful evaluation of research? We all know the answer: it is limited resources. There are too few jobs for the

multitude of post-docs and graduate students in training. I am a culprit here, having worked with more than 35 post-docs and more than 20 graduate students! Equally significant, of course, is the limited amount of grant funds. If you know that there is only a 1 in 5, or worse, chance that your grant will be funded, are you going to be philanthropic with your ideas, and most importantly, your time? The result is that more than ever, scientific research has become a competition for ever-diminishing resources. It is sad to see so many young promising researchers showing clear signs of battle fatigue.

While I am in a moaning mood there is another aspect of the pursuit of science that I am disturbed about. It is the insidious growth of the use of "impact factor." I go to job search committee meetings at my own Institution and advise other Universities by reviewing their Biology/Mol Biol Depts, and too often hear that Dr X has Y number of publications but none in Cell, Science or Nature or their satellite journals. I suspect that where a job search has 100's of candidates, the first screen may be done by a secretary who counts up the number of publications in these "so called" high impact journals.

- Does impact factor determine promotion? It appears so.
- Does it count when evaluating grant applications?
- Do you organize your research with a thought to what will get into Cell, Science or Nature, knowing that your paper goes to an anonymous Editor who decides if it is interesting enough,

independent of any consideration of the scientific merit of the work?

Through much of my career, bioenergetics was “of limited interest” to the Editors of these journals. Will we end up with the journal editors deciding on the areas of research worth pursuing?

Enough already! But oh how I long for the good old days. How can I forget a bioenergetics meeting when Dr X reported that the proton to electron ratio in OXPHOS was 6 or 7 (I do forget this detail), then to be surprised by Dr Y coming to the podium, grabbing the microphone, and telling the audience that he had published the same result already and was being ignored. Where is the competition in that? It is just good debate!

Seriously, let us try to make MIG a place where ideas can be critiqued, where collaborations can be initiated, and the contributions not limited to who has a bottle of Z in their fridge that they are willing to share, or how to measure membrane potential etc.

Next month: back to reviewing the literature with a synopsis of the role of mitochondria in anti-viral immunity.