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Fitoterapia

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Editorial



Fitoterapia is a well-established Journal in the science publishing arena. Its first issue appeared, in Italian, in 1924, at a time when our clinical arsenal was still essentially derived from plants, and most drugs were, with a few notable exceptions, extracts, combinations of extracts, or complex mixtures of natural products. *Fitoterapia* saw the light as an “alert journal” for pharmacists and physicians, and its aim was to fill the gap between research on plant compounds and clinical practice. It consisted of brief accounts of original research articles and of reviews, and was published by Inverni della Beffa, a leading Italian company in plant extracts and pure natural products. Over the years, *Fitoterapia* started to publish original articles, mainly in the realm of alkaloid chemistry and bioactivity, and this led to a growing interest and recognition for the Journal. In 1971, under the Editorship

of Attilio Bonati, *Fitoterapia*, while maintaining its original name, became truly international by switching to English and French, and in the Nineties it moved to Indena when this company evolved from Inverni Della Beffa. Since 1999, *Fitoterapia* has been co-published jointly by Indena and Elsevier, with Prof. Francesca Pelizzoni serving as the Editor-in-Chief from 2002–2008.

This brief account on the history of *Fitoterapia* reminds readers that the only successful optimization is that of change. *Fitoterapia* has evolved much during the years, and when I agreed to take the helm of the Journal, I committed myself to allow the Journal to continue to do so. At a time when natural products seem to have fallen out of favor in drug discovery, great commitment is required from both Editors and authors to again achieve the recognition this field deserves. There are clear molecular, evolutionary and structural bases for the relevance of natural products in drug discovery, and *Fitoterapia* will take upon the task to bring them to the attention of the biomedical community. A major change has already been implemented, namely the introduction of an electronic submission system, aligning *Fitoterapia* with the other Journals of Elsevier’s portfolio. This has made it possible to cut down the time from submission to reviewing and publishing, now fully in line with other Journals in the field. At the same time, authors will be able to track the state of their publication by taking full advantage of electronic submission system.

What type of articles will *Fitoterapia* publish? To answer this question, I have analyzed the current publishing scene in the field of plant natural products, and came to the conclusion that *Fitoterapia* should, first of all, have a character, its own flavour, and should not simply try to imitate other Journals already well established in the field, and whose excellence would be difficult to achieve by sheer imitation. Personality could only come from a clear definition of the aims of the Journal. Just as *Fitoterapia* was born as a link between academic research and clinical practice, I believe that nowadays the Journal should take a central position between the investigation of crude extracts and the clinical development of compounds obtained from them. This will require a focus on all molecular aspects, both chemical and biological, involved in this process. Articles on the structure elucidation of bioactive compounds, on the identification of their target, and, in general, on the biological role of plant secondary metabolites will furnish the primary examples of what *Fitoterapia* would like to publish. Critical reviews on what we can learn from thousands of years of use of medicinal plants will also be

welcomed, especially if molecularly-oriented, as well as manuscripts dealing with the analytical and genomic characterization of medicinal plants, an essential step for their pharmaceutical exploitation.

The success of the Journal will critically depend on the interaction that I and the Advisory Board will be able to establish with the readers and the contributors, the real makers of the Journals.

When I consider the enormous work that the past Editor-in-Chief, Prof. Francesca Pelizzoni, and her Editors, Dr. Bruno Gabetta and Dr. Salvatore Malandrino have taken on, two quotations come to my mind. The first one is by Winston Churchill: *Never was so much owed by so many to so few*. How could they manage the Journal almost single-handed? The second one is by Virgil: *Carpent tua poma nepotes* (Your descendants will pluck your fruits). I am now harvesting the fruit from the seeds they have sown, and I am therefore grateful to them for all they have done to move *Fitoterapia* from a niche Journal to an internationally recognized publication in the realm of medicinal plants and bioactive compounds. I will do my best to steer *Fitoterapia* in the direction they have traced.



Prof. Francesca Pelizzoni, former Editor-in-Chief (courtesy of Prof. Claudio Jommi)

Fitoterapia was born in publishing terms, long ago, but, just as Longfellow wrote, *Age is opportunity no less/Than youth itself, though in another dress,/And as the evening twilight fades away/The sky is filled with stars, invisible by day*. Rational Drug discovery in its stellar enthusiasm seems to have adopted the Olympic motto (*citius, altius, fortius*), aiming at the highest number of compounds in the shortest time and with the strongest potency, and in frantically doing so, is missing the many stars that *Fitoterapia*, its authors, and readers, hope to bring into the limelight of biomedical research. Plant natural products are our pharmaceutical cultural heritage, since their exquisite biological specificity has laid the foundations of modern medicine. The best wish I can make to the Journal is to foster interest in plant natural products and their medicinal application in the widest possible audience, and I am grateful to Indena and Elsevier for giving me the opportunity to contribute to this as the Editor-in-chief.

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