

## A day with a Nobel Laureate

7 October 2008 was just like any other normal day, till I heard the news that Harald zur Hausen, Germany had won the 2008 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine<sup>1</sup>.

I had met zur Hausen at a conference in Kolkata in January 1998. The Chittaranjan National Cancer Institute had hosted the 17th Annual Convention of the Indian Association for Cancer Research (where I was then working as a research associate). zur Hausen was as an invited speaker at the conference. In his keynote address, zur Hausen talked of his pioneering work on isolation and classification of important papilloma virus types, particularly types 16 and 18.

In 1974, at a meeting in Key Biscayne, Florida, zur Hausen first reported that it was not herpes simplex virus<sup>2</sup>, as was initially suspected, but human papilloma virus (HPV) which was etiologically linked with cervical cancer<sup>2</sup>. Initially his work received a great deal of scientific criticism, but subsequently was confirmed

and extended to other high-risk papilloma viruses. zur Hausen and his collaborators<sup>3</sup>, then identified HPV16 and HPV18 in cervical cancers in 1983–84. This work directly made possible the development of a vaccine<sup>4</sup>, which was introduced in 2006.

Immediately after the announcement of the Nobel Prize, in a telephonic interview, zur Hausen said that he had not yet decided what he would do with this ten million dollar. He commented, 'I hope indeed, that this Nobel Prize will of course create more awareness of the role of infectious agents in human cancer'.

zur Hausen is presently Professor Emeritus and maintains a laboratory at German Cancer Center, Heidelberg. His other honours include the American Association of Cancer Research's Award for Lifetime Achievement, the Charles S. Mott Prize of the General Motors Cancer Research Foundation, etc.

I feel proud and privileged today to have had a chance to meet and interact

with zur Hausen. During the short span of time that he spent with us, zur Hausen took keen interest in enquiring about our research programmes and had also given us advice and suggestions for improvement. His recognition and achievements are a source of inspiration to all those working in this field of research.

1. Nobelprize.org, 6 October 2008.
2. Durst, M., Gissmann, L., Ikenberg, H. and zur Hausen, H., *Proc. Natl Acad. Sci. USA*, 1983, **80**, 3812–3815.
3. Boshart, M., Gissmann, L., Ikenberg, H., Kleinheinz, A., Scheurlen, W. and zur Hausen, H., *EMBO J.*, 1984, **3**, 1151–1157.
4. Harper, D. M. *et al.*, *Lancet*, 2006, **367**, 1247–1255.

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## On the controversy of impact factor

Albeit there exists a lot of criticism, the impact factor, as calculated by Thomson Scientific, is the only quantitative value for ranking scientific journals. It is a quantitative grading of journals, indicating the average quality of the research articles published in the corresponding journal. It is difficult to grade the quality of an article. An article may be popular due its interest in a wider field and may be cited more by many workers when compared to an important and in-depth work of any other field. Whatever may be the work, the quantitative estimation of the article would be the number of citations, whether by a single research school, by workers of a common field or by workers from various fields; and cited in the same journal or in journals of a single publishing house or those published widely. At least this can help the non-technical persons to screen the quality of publications or to grade the research publications for providing incentive to the

researcher. A simple quantitative gradation of research activities of different persons may be either the summation of citations of the all research articles or the summation of the product of a number of articles and impact factor of the journals, though the former seems to be better. For academic purpose or to solve any research problem, neither the citations of research articles, nor the impact factors contributes. Sometimes, a citation as personal communication has proved to be important in solving a research problem.

In many Indian universities, for the selection of faculty the research journals are classified into national and international while considering the research publications and different marks are allotted for each class, mostly higher for international journals. While quantifying these values by non-technical persons, for adjudging research publications in chemistry sometimes, the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, USA*,

is considered as a national journal and *International Journal of Chemical Sciences, India* is considered as international journal. To avoid this type of controversy, till date the impact factor is the only criterion for considering the quality of journals, and thus an article published in a journal with high impact factor should be considered as a quality article.

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