

Concluding a 15-year tenure as Editor-in-Chief of *Annals of Gastroenterology*: growth, challenges and achievements

Ioannis E. Koutroubakis

University Hospital of Heraklion, Medical School,
University of Crete, Greece

Fifteen years ago, the Hellenic Society of Gastroenterology entrusted me with the honor—and responsibility—of leading *Annals of Gastroenterology* as Editor-in-Chief. What began as an exciting professional undertaking soon evolved into a defining period of my career, marked by daily commitment and the collaboration of exceptional colleagues and partners, both in Greece and internationally.

Prior to 2010, the journal was primarily a national publication, rooted in the Greek gastroenterology community. It was rich in clinical insight, featuring studies from Greece, but had limited international reach. Over the past decade and a half, thanks to the combined efforts of our editorial team, the strong support of the Hellenic Society of Gastroenterology, and the contributions of many friends from abroad, *Annals of Gastroenterology* has transformed into a truly international journal. Today, it publishes high-quality clinical and basic science studies from around the world, representing a wide range of perspectives and expertise that enrich our discipline.

A key development during my tenure was the transition—common to most journals, including ours—from traditional print to fully free, online open access. This shift removed geographic barriers, enabling readers worldwide to access content instantly. It also allowed faster dissemination, integration of multimedia, and improved discoverability through indexing and search platforms. Significantly, unlike most open-access journals today, *Annals of Gastroenterology* has remained completely free for both readers and authors, with no article processing charges or subscription costs. This reflects our deep commitment to equitable access to scientific knowledge. It is also important to note that the journal operates without the involvement of a commercial publishing house. Owned and managed entirely by the Hellenic Society of Gastroenterology, it maintains complete editorial independence, with decisions based solely on scientific quality and relevance.

During this time, the global publishing environment has changed dramatically. The proliferation of open-access journals, many backed by large publishing groups with substantial marketing resources, has intensified competition for visibility and high-quality submissions—particularly in specialized fields like gastroenterology. In such a landscape, sustaining rigorous peer review, editorial autonomy, and a genuinely cost-free publishing model has been vital to preserving the credibility of *Annals of Gastroenterology*. The fact that our readership has grown and our reputation has

strengthened is a tribute to the trust and loyalty of our authors, reviewers, and readers.

Along this journey, we achieved several important milestones: securing indexing in major databases, including PubMed; obtaining the journal's first official Impact Factor; and steadily increasing readership, article submissions and citations worldwide. These achievements reflect the growing trust and recognition of the global gastroenterology community.

One measure of the journal's quality has been its selectivity, with only about 20% of submissions accepted in recent years. While this inevitably means that many strong manuscripts cannot be published, it reflects our dedication to maintaining the highest methodological and editorial standards. Each submission receives careful peer review, and those ultimately selected represent originality, rigor, and clinical importance.

In recent years, one of the most pressing challenges for academic publishing—and for *Annals of Gastroenterology*—has been the difficulty of securing expert reviewers. The workload for clinicians and researchers has grown considerably, while the explosion of new journals has multiplied review requests. This has made timely, detailed evaluations harder to obtain. Even so, our reviewers have remained remarkably committed, and their efforts have been essential to upholding the journal's standards.

Throughout my service, I personally evaluated every manuscript submitted, from initial screening to the final decision. This hands-on approach allowed me to preserve a clear editorial vision, ensure fairness and consistency, and stay closely engaged with the evolving scientific dialogue in our field.

Equally important, no paper was ever accepted without undergoing full peer review—a principle I considered non-negotiable. This safeguard helped preserve the integrity of the journal and the trust of our readers.

Today, *Annals of Gastroenterology* (Impact Factor 2.2, CiteScore 4.1) holds a respected position within the international gastroenterology publishing arena. While not competing with the highest-impact generalist journals, it occupies a solid middle tier, combining strong regional roots with growing global influence. In the context of Greek medical publishing, it is one of very few national society journals—across all specialties—with uninterrupted PubMed indexing and a standing Impact Factor. This unique combination of national representation and international recognition shows that even a specialty journal from a small scientific community can achieve global visibility.

Behind every published article lies the indispensable work of our secretarial and editorial staff. They managed submissions with precision, coordinated communication between authors, editors and reviewers, ensured deadlines were met, and meticulously checked every detail—from language and formatting to references and proofs. Their professionalism, patience and quiet efficiency kept the journal running smoothly and upheld the high standards our readers expect.

This success would not have been possible without the tireless dedication of all those who served over the years as associate editors, section editors and reviewers. I owe special gratitude to our many international friends who supported the

journal as authors, reviewers and advisors. Their willingness to collaborate, critique and champion *Annals of Gastroenterology* was vital in raising its profile and credibility on the world stage.

Over these 15 years, scholarly publishing has undergone profound changes—the rise of open access, evolving peer review models, and heightened scrutiny of research ethics and reproducibility. Moreover, recently artificial intelligence (AI) tools have begun influencing several aspects of publishing. While AI offers opportunities for greater efficiency and consistency, it also raises questions about authorship, transparency and ethical use. We faced these developments with transparency and adaptability, ensuring that *Annals of Gastroenterology* remained both rigorous and relevant.

Looking ahead, I believe the future of *Annals of Gastroenterology* will depend on embracing innovation while safeguarding its core values. Strengthening international collaborations, expanding the pool of expert reviewers, and further improving the visibility of published research should be among the priorities. Exploring new formats—such as visual abstracts, podcasts, or enhanced multimedia—may also help engage a broader readership. Finally, maintaining transparency, ethical rigor and cost-free access will ensure that the journal continues to serve as a trusted and inclusive platform for our community.

It is now time to pass the torch. The journal's future is bright, and I have full confidence in the new leadership to continue

this journey with fresh vision and energy. My responsibilities may shift, but my respect and admiration for this community remain unchanged.

Serving as Editor-in-Chief has been an honor beyond measure. I leave with gratitude, pride, and the knowledge that *Annals of Gastroenterology* will continue to uphold the highest standards of rigor, ethics, and peer review, ensuring its role as a trusted source of knowledge in gastroenterology.

Department of Gastroenterology, University Hospital of Heraklion, Medical School, University of Crete, Greece

Conflict of interest: None

Correspondence to: Ioannis E. Koutroubakis MD, PhD, Professor of Medicine, Dept of Gastroenterology, University Hospital of Heraklion, P.O. BOX 1352, 71110 Heraklion, Crete, Greece, e-mail: koutroui@uoc.gr

Received 18 August 2025; accepted 18 August 2025; published online 26 September 2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.20524/aog.2025.1003>

This is an open access journal, and articles are distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 License, which allows others to remix, tweak, and build upon the work non-commercially, as long as appropriate credit is given and the new creations are licensed under the identical terms