

What makes a research paper outstanding? There are obvious indicators: originality of the research question, statistical rigour, a clear presentation and discussion of the ideas and issues raised by the research.

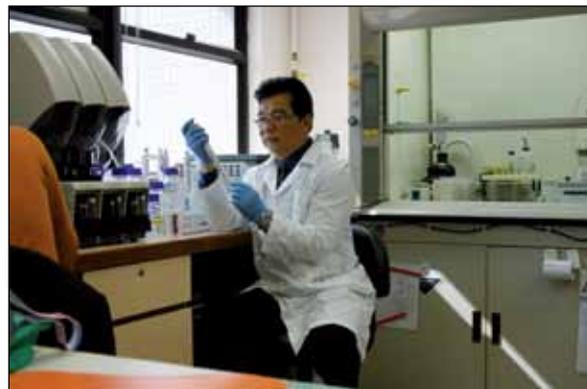
But these are all features you would expect to find in any original paper accepted for publication in a respected academic journal. Thus, over the three years since the *Hong Kong Medical Journal* (HKMJ) launched our Best Original Paper Award, we have found it increasingly difficult to choose between the finalists.

What usually gives a paper the edge is its relevance to local medical practice. Last year there were several candidates offering insights into how we manage problems specific to our population. In *'Should young age be a contra-indication to breast conservation treatment in Chinese women? Twelve-year experience from a public cancer centre in Hong Kong'*, TK Yau et al analysed more than a decade of clinical data to answer the controversial questions surrounding breast conservation surgery in young Chinese women with breast cancer.

The international editorial board, our final arbiters in the Best Original Paper selection process, praised this paper for its clinical significance. "It deals with a critically important question involving relatively young women with an extremely common form of cancer and I thought that the conclusions, if confirmed, are very important indeed." said one international advisory board member.

Another paper that impressed international editorial board members, *'Impact of diabetes on early and mid-term survival after coronary bypass graft surgery in the Hong Kong Chinese population'*, was also considered a valuable assessment of clinical experience in the Hong Kong population. One of the judges noted: "This is an interesting audit of patients undergoing coronary artery bypass surgery...I am impressed that the results were so good in the diabetic group, especially as their risk scores were higher."

Surgery for ischaemic disease seemed to be a bit of a theme this year, with a second paper on the subject, *'Bypass surgery or percutaneous transluminal angioplasty to treat critical lower limb ischaemia due to infrainguinal arterial occlusive disease'* attracting praise for its clinical relevance. "My selection was based largely on methodology and applicability to the broadest category of patients," wrote one international board member when recommending



Member of winning team, Dr Tony Mak, in his laboratory at the Princess Margaret Hospital

this paper.

Having said local clinical relevance was important, it was international relevance that enabled the winner to emerge from the pack. Poon et al's paper documenting the first known outbreak of hypoglycaemia following adulteration of illegal sexual enhancement products, *'Outbreak of hypoglycaemia: sexual enhancement products containing oral hypoglycaemic agent'* was described as an internationally, as well as locally, important paper.

"This paper is internationally important since such drugs are circulating elsewhere, in other Chinese communities" wrote one judge. "I was rather impressed with the detective work leading to the use of non-prescription drugs including hypoglycaemia. Given the fact that some patients died and two suffered long-term complications this is potentially a very serious problem and the authors should be congratulated for identifying the source."

After learning of their success, Poon et al's award winning team said that even though there was a lot of international interest in their paper, it was local clinical relevance they considered most important. For this reason they submitted the paper to the HKMJ, believing this was the most effective way to reach local clinicians, said Dr Tony Mak, one of the paper's authors.

Bearing this in mind, we look forward to bringing you another crop of original, relevant and important original articles this year!

MARGARET HARRIS CHENG