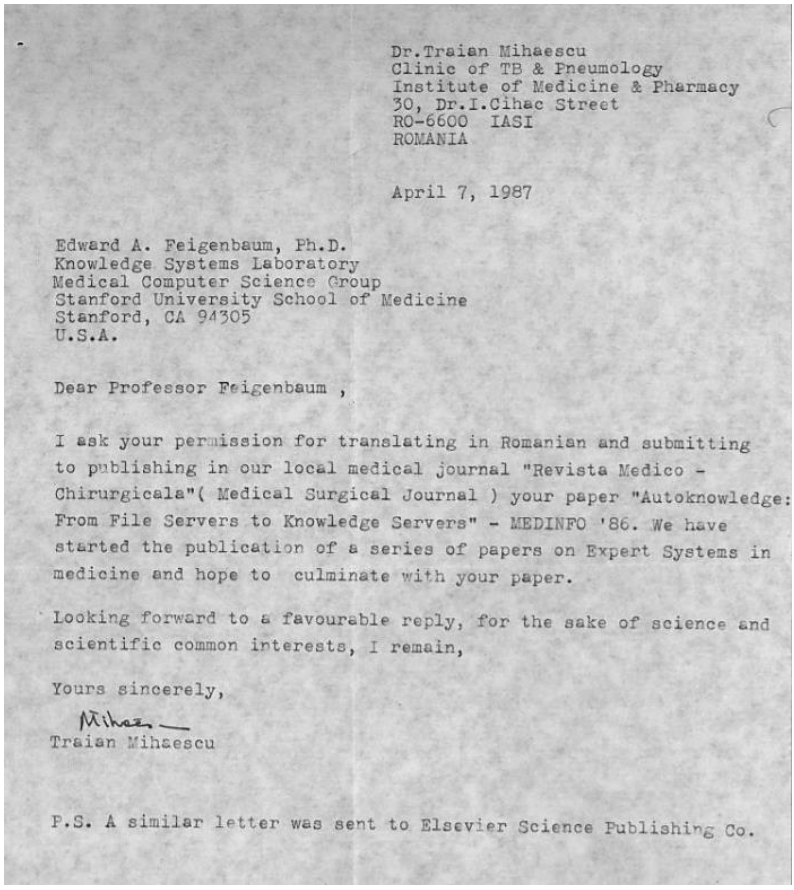
Med. Surg. J. – Rev. Med. Chir. Soc. Med. Nat., Iaşi 2026, 130(3): 465-470 doi: 10.22551/MSJ.2026.03.02

EDITORIAL

THE MEDICAL-SURGICAL JOURNAL AND EDWARD A. FEIGENBAUM: THE ARRIVAL OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN ROMANIAN MEDICAL PUBLISHING

On 7 April 1987, a typewritten letter left the Clinic of Tuberculosis and Pneumology of the Institute of Medicine and Pharmacy in Iaşi, 30 Dr. I. Cihac Street, for Stanford, California. It was addressed to Edward A. Feigenbaum, of the Knowledge Systems Laboratory and the Medical Computer Science Group at Stanford University School of Medicine - the man the history of computing calls the father of expert systems.



Dr.Traian Mihaescu
Clinic of TB & Pneumology
Institute of Medicine & Pharmacy
30, Dr.I.Cihac Street
RO-6600 IASI
ROMANIA

April 7, 1987

Edward A. Feigenbaum, Ph.D.
Knowledge Systems Laboratory
Medical Computer Science Group
Stanford University School of Medicine
Stanford, CA 94305
U.S.A.

Dear Professor Feigenbaum ,

I ask your permission for translating in Romanian and submitting to publishing in our local medical journal "Revista Medico - Chirurgicala"(Medical Surgical Journal) your paper "Autoknowledge: From File Servers to Knowledge Servers" - MEDINFO '86. We have started the publication of a series of papers on Expert Systems in medicine and hope to culminate with your paper.

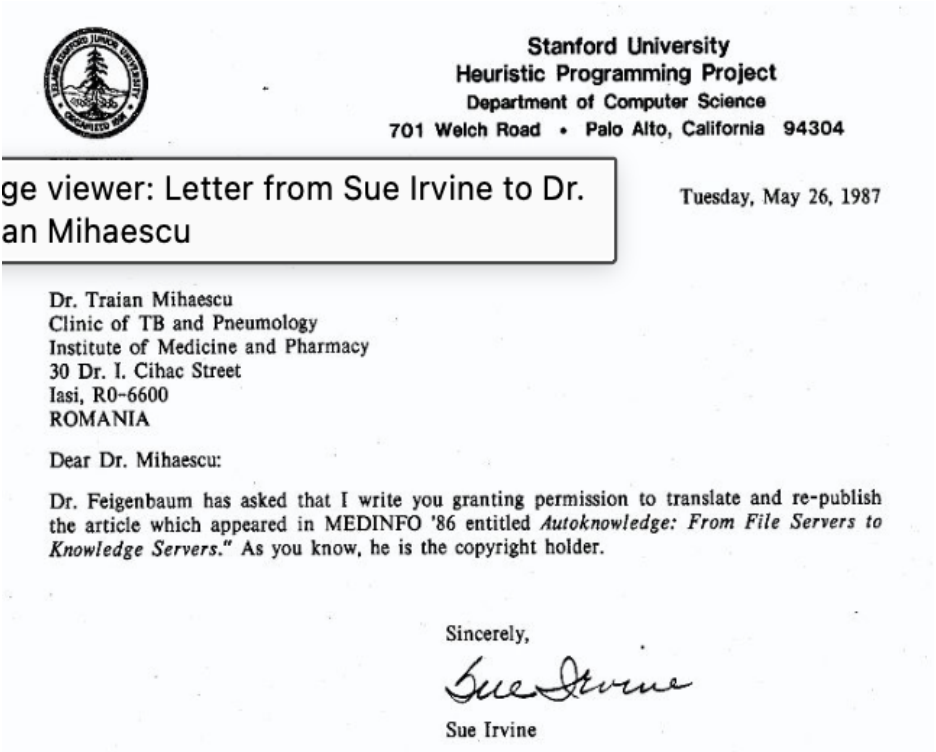
Looking forward to a favourable reply, for the sake of science and scientific common interests, I remain,

Yours sincerely,

Mihaes—
Traian Mihaescu

P.S. A similar letter was sent to Elsevier Science Publishing Co.

Fig. 1. Letter to Edward A. Feigenbaum, Iaşi, 7 April 1987.
Reproduced from the copy held in the Edward A. Feigenbaum Papers (SC0340), Department of Special Collections and University Archives, Stanford University Libraries.



Stanford University
Heuristic Programming Project
Department of Computer Science
701 Welch Road • Palo Alto, California 94304

ge viewer: Letter from Sue Irvine to Dr.
an Mihaescu

Tuesday, May 26, 1987

Dr. Traian Mihaescu
Clinic of TB and Pneumology
Institute of Medicine and Pharmacy
30 Dr. I. Cihac Street
Iasi, R0-6600
ROMANIA

Dear Dr. Mihaescu:

Dr. Feigenbaum has asked that I write you granting permission to translate and re-publish the article which appeared in MEDINFO '86 entitled *Autoknowledge: From File Servers to Knowledge Servers.*" As you know, he is the copyright holder.

Sincerely,

Sue Irvine

Fig. 2. Reply signed by Sue Irvine on behalf of E. A. Feigenbaum, Palo Alto,26 May 1987. Same source; the capture shows the Stanford digital viewer window, with the catalogue label "Letter from Sue Irvine to Dr. Traian Mihaescu" overlying the letterhead.

The letter asked permission to translate into Romanian, and to publish in the *Medical-Surgical Journal* of the Society of Physicians and Naturalists of Iasi, his MEDINFO '86 paper "Auto knowledge: From File Servers to Knowledge Servers".

The reply came on 26 May 1987, on Heuristic Programming Project letterhead, Department of Computer Science, 701 Welch Road, Palo Alto. It was signed by Sue Irvine, of Feigenbaum's office, on his behalf: Dr. Feigenbaum had asked her to write granting permission to translate and re-publish the MEDINFO '86 article, adding that he was the copyright holder.

Seven weeks, transatlantic mail, Romania in 1987. Both documents are today held in the Edward A. Feigenbaum Papers (SC0340) at the Department of Special Collections and University Archives, Stanford University Libraries, digitized and individually catalogued. I found them again almost four decades later, in an archive that was not ours. What follows is an attempt to explain why they are worth recovering.

A journal built on exchange

The Medical-Surgical Journal did not reach Stanford by accident. It is the oldest Romanian medical publication with an unbroken title: the first issue of the Bulle-

tin of the Society of Physicians and Naturalists of Iaşi appeared on 1 January 1887, printed in two columns, Romanian and French, with an explicit appeal to the universality of science. It has carried its present name since 1924. It survived two world wars and a political suspension between 1949 and 1956, when the communist authorities centralized medical publishing; it resumed with volume 60 through the intervention of Vasile Răşcanu, C. I. Parhon and N. Hortolomei.

Publication exchange was, from the beginning, its mechanism of intellectual survival. In 1896, with only 49 ordinary members, the Society received 92 foreign journals in exchange. In 1929, of 500 printed copies, 63 went abroad. In 1931 the British Museum requested back issues to complete its collection, and in 1932 the Health Section of the League of Nations counted it among the major medical publications. Through the decades of isolation after 1965, the inside and back covers of every issue listed the exchanges with foreign publications - an excellent and economical way, as the editors put it, of keeping the library current at a time of no funding at all. By its centenary the journal was exchanged with 275 periodicals from 43 countries and indexed in 22 databases, among them Index Medicus/MEDLINE, which it had entered in 1966 (1, 2).

It was through this exchange circuit that the MEDINFO '86 proceedings - the fifth World Congress on Medical Informatics, Washington, October 1986, published by North-Holland/Elsevier (3) - reached Iaşi less than six months after the congress. And in the editorial office led by Grigore Teodorovici, where I was responsible for international scientific exchange, someone read that volume with a pencil in hand.

A series on expert systems, 1986-1987

The April 1987 letter contains a sentence found nowhere in the journal's historiography: the editors had begun publishing a series of papers on expert systems in medicine, and hoped to culminate it with Feigenbaum's paper. The journal was therefore already running a series on medical artificial intelligence - MYCIN, INTERNIST and DENDRAL were, in those years, the subjects filling the pages of Western medical informatics journals - and Feigenbaum's text was to close it.

The context is worth recalling. Expert systems were, in the mid-1980s, the dominant form of applied artificial intelligence: programs that encoded a specialist's knowledge as rules and made it available to others. Feigenbaum had just warned, in The Fifth Generation (1983), that Japan would dominate the technology; MEDINFO '86 was where the medical community discussed how file servers would become knowledge servers - the title of his address. That a general medical journal in an Eastern European university town was simultaneously running a series on the subject says something about the synchrony that publication exchange made possible even in the most closed years.

Copyright, in 1987

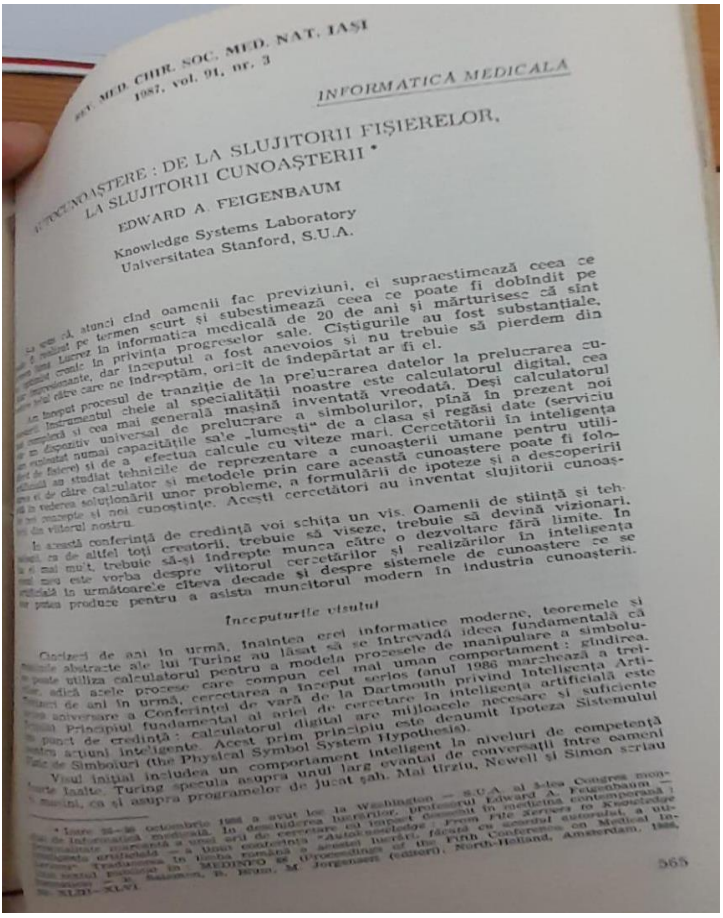
The postscript of my letter - that a similar letter had been sent to Elsevier Science Publishing Co. - deserves a note. The MEDINFO volume was published by Elsevier, so the request was addressed in parallel to author and publisher. The Stanford reply settled the matter: Feigenbaum had retained copyright in his address, so his consent sufficed.

In Romanian editorial practice of the 1980s, translations of foreign articles often circulated with no formality whatev-

er. That an editorial office in Iaşi asked for, and obtained, written permission in the exact terms of copyright shows that the standards the journal would adopt explicitly after 1990 - the ICMJE Uniform Requirements, invoked in our 1990 correspondence with the *Psychiatric Bulletin of the Royal College of Psychiatrists* (4) - were already being practiced, tacitly, before they became obligatory.

What happened next

The translation appeared the same year, in issue 3 of volume 91 (1987) - the volume of the journal's nominal centenary - under the title "Autocunoaştere: de la slujitorii fişierelor la slujitorii cunoaşterii", in the Medical Informatics section, pages 565-569, in my own translation (5). The footnote records that the text was the opening address of the fifth World Congress on Medical Informatics, Washington, 26-30 October 1986, and that the translation was made with the author's consent from the MEDINFO 86 volume, pages XLIII-XLVI. The full circuit - volume received in exchange, request for permission, consent, printed translation - closed in less than a year.



REV. MED.-CHIR. SOC. MED. NAT. IAŞI
1987, vol. 91, nr. 3

INFORMATICA MEDICALĂ

AUTOCUNOAŞTERE: DE LA SLUJITORII FIŞIERELOR, LA SLUJITORII CUNOAŞTERII*

EDWARD A. FEIGENBAUM

Knowledge Systems Laboratory
Universitatea Stanford, S.U.A.

Începuturile visului

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Fig. 3. First page of the translation: *Rev. Med. Chir. Soc. Med. Nat. Iaşi* 1987, vol. 91, no. 3, p. 565, Medical Informatics section.

Photograph of the copy in the library of the Society of Physicians and Naturalists of Iaşi.

The Romanian title deserves a remark of its own. The word "server" did not exist in Romanian in 1987; I chose "slujitor" - servant, one who serves - which preserves the etymology of the English term and its sense of an instrument placed at someone's service. The coinage had a short life, since Romanian later borrowed the term as it stood, but it marks the moment when the concepts of computing were entering a language that did not yet have words for them.

I have found no other authorized Romanian translation of Feigenbaum from the communist period.

The rest of the history is known, at least in outline. Expert systems did not transform medicine as promised: too rigid, too costly to maintain, dependent on hand-written rules. The artificial intelligence winter of the late 1980s pushed them out of view. What returned three decades later under the name of artificial intelligence in medicine is a different technology - statistical models trained on data rather than rules encoded by experts - but the questions it raises are largely those of 1986: how clinical knowledge is transferred into a system, who answers for an assisted decision, and how the physician's reasoning is preserved when the machine proposes the answer.

Why two letters matter

Three reasons. The first is documentary: the correspondence fixes, to the day, the moment when Romanian medical publishing came into contact with the frontier of artificial intelligence, and it does so through sources preserved in an archive independent of us. The second is methodological: the episode shows how publication exchange actually worked - not as a librarian's formality but as a system for importing ideas, with a complete circuit from volume received to translation printed. The third is perhaps personal: whoever writes today about artificial intelligence in medicine is writing, without knowing it, a continuation.

The address on the letter - Dr. I. Cihac Street, named after the founder of the Society in 1830 - is a coincidence. But well-documented coincidences are all that the small history of a journal has.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author is one of the correspondents in the documents discussed and was, at the time, a member of the editorial board of this journal.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author thanks Rodica Coman and Professor Eugen Târcoveanu for their help in locating the archival and the bibliographic sources on which this note is based.

Traian Mihăescu, *M.D., Ph.D.*
Professor of Pneumology,
Former member of the editorial board,
Medical-Surgical Journal of the Society of Physicians and Naturalists of Iaşi;
Formerly Clinic of Pneumology,
"Grigore T. Popa" University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Iaşi, Romania

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7. Răşcanu V. Semnificaţia istorică şi ştiinţifică a Revistei Medico-Chirurgicale din Iaşi. *Rev Med Chir Soc Med Nat Iaşi* 1956; 60(1): 1-4.

DECLARATION ON THE USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

The primary documents were identified by the author in the Stanford digital catalogue and transcribed by the author together with Claude Fable 5.1 (Anthropic) from the reproductions. The model was used to verify secondary sources published online (anniversary editorials, the NLM and SCImago catalogues), to draft a first version of the text and to structure the argument, and to produce this English version from the Romanian original. The choice of episode, the recollection of the 1987 context, the unpublished facts (the series on expert systems, the correspondence with Elsevier, the appearance of the translation) and the decisions about what to leave out are the author’s. No factual statement in the text derives from the model alone; each has a cited source or is explicitly marked as pending verification.