

Guest Editorial

The Road Less Traveled: Nurturing A Medical Journal's Quest for International Indexation and Impact Factor

Akhtar Sherin

Chief Editor, Khyber Medical University Journal, Khyber Medical University Peshawar, Pakistan

Vice President, Eastern Mediterranean Association of Medical Editors (EMAME)

Former President, Pakistan Association of Medical Editors (PAME)

Email: _akhtarsherin@yahoo.com

Journal Impact Factor (JIF), proposed by Eugene Garfield in early 1960s, is considered as the one of the most widely recognized and influential metrics for scholarly journal ranking in the world. It provided a standardized measure based on the citation data for evaluation of journals. In 1975, the *Institute for Scientific Information* introduced the initial version of the *Journal Citation Reports* (JCR) as an essential part of the *Science Citation Index*, spearheaded by Eugene Garfield. First JCR was based on 4,248,065 citations of around 400,000 source items published during 1974 in 2400 journals.¹ Since then, JCR & JIF have undergone significant developments and transformations. They became widely adopted tools for evaluating research impact and journal prestige. Over the years, the IF and JCR expanded their coverage, incorporating more journals and disciplines. Recently released JCR 2023 comprised of 21,522 journals (including 13,668 science journals) from 112 countries across 254 research disciplines.²

The year 2023 witnessed exciting developments in the academic world, as an impressive total of 9,136 journals achieved their first-ever JIF in JCR 2023.³ The news was particularly impressive for Pakistan's medical journals, as nine of them obtained their first-ever JIF, signifying a momentous milestone in recognizing their scholarly contributions and elevating their visibility on the global stage.

Previously, Pakistan Journal of Medical Sciences, Journal of the College of Physicians and Surgeons Pakistan & Journal of Pakistan Medical Association stood as the esteemed trio of journals that were privileged with JIF. The cohort of new journals, joining the exclusive group of JIF recipients, include Annals of King Edward Medical University Lahore, Khyber Medical University Journal, Rawal Medical Journal, Gomal Journal of Medical Sciences, Anaesthesia Pain & Intensive Care, Journal of Pioneering Medical Sciences, Journal of the Liaquat University of Medical and Health Sciences, Pakistan Heart Journal and Annals of Abbasi Shaheed Hospital & Karachi Medical & Dental College. The editors of these journals deserve special recognition and appreciation for their diligent efforts and firm commitment to upholding the high editorial standards which undoubtedly played a significant role in achieving this remarkable milestone. Each of these journals underwent a meticulous and rigorous quality evaluation process by Web of Science (WOS). WOS employs a comprehensive set of 28 criteria to assess journals for inclusion in WOS Core Collection.⁴ Journals meeting 24 quality criteria, emphasizing editorial rigor and adherence to best practices, are included in WOS Emerging Sources Citation Index™. Additionally, journals meeting four impact criteria, with citation activity as the primary indicator, are included in WOS Science Citation Index Expanded™, representing influential journals in their respective fields.

Undoubtedly a mark of prestige and recognition within the scholarly community, the path towards



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international indexation and JIF achievement for new journals is fraught with lot of challenges and obstacles. Besides meeting the prerequisites of WOS, local scientific journals are confronted with various additional challenges and issues related to indexation. These challenges encompass the absence of high-quality research output in Pakistan, the submission of articles of poor quality, deficiencies in the submission process, peer review standards and consistency or lack thereof in the in-house assessments.⁵⁻⁸ Another pressing concern is the inadequate training of editors in terms of establishment of a comprehensive editorial policy, awareness about the indexation process, publication ethics and the quality metrics utilized for journal ranking.^{5,6,9} The shortage of competent reviewers further compound the issues faced by these journals.¹⁰

Over the past two decades, a significant challenge encountered by local journals has been their inability to secure Medline indexation. As a consequence, the content published in these journals is not being effectively retrieved during searches on Medline. Moreover, the unavailability of costly software tools, like Extensible Markup Language (XML) file developers in Pakistan, poses a significant obstacle to obtaining Pubmed Central indexation, which is crucial for enhancing visibility on PubMed.^{11,12} This lack of visibility on Medline/Pubmed and poor accessibility of the journal's content to a broader audience has a direct impact on the citation rates by international researchers, further hindering the global reach and recognition of these journals.

Addressing these challenges needs training and capacity-building initiatives for editors, reviewers and authors; investment in health research, updated technology and infrastructure for the journals; and strong networking at national and international level. In this pursuit, collaborative efforts from the government, regulatory bodies like Higher Education Commission, and Pakistan Medical & Dental Council, research institutions such as universities and medical colleges, and editor's associations like Pakistan Association of Medical Editors (PAME), Eastern Mediterranean Association of Medical Editors (EMAME), and World Association of Medical Editors (WAME) are indispensable.^{8,12,13} By working together, they can pave the way for a bright future for Pakistani medical journals, marked by improved international indexation, higher impact

factors, and broader global recognition. As these collective endeavors come to fruition, we remain optimistic that Pakistani medical journals will continue to make substantial contributions to the global scientific community, elevating the nation's presence on the global stage of medical research and innovation.

Key Words: Journal Impact Factor (MeSH), Indexation (Non-MeSH), Medical Journals (Non-MeSH), Pakistan (MeSH)

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