

Difficulties getting published in high-impact journals

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To the Editor—We appreciate the *Hong Kong Medical Journal* (HKMJ)'s efforts to emphasise transparency and responsiveness, in the form of editorials, letters, and other correspondence during and after publication. Our research team has faced various difficulties submitting articles and getting published. Owing to the novelty and impact of our research and the compatibility with the journal, we hoped to submit to one of the most prestigious medical journals in our field. However, the author guidelines of our target journal indicate that original research articles are usually not considered for publication, and the majority of published articles are solicited reviews. Those guidelines also indicate that unsolicited editorials and short commentaries may be considered for publication. In contrast, HKMJ accepts a variety of article types with a focus on improving care of patients. This approach is also adopted by many other journals; for example, in his first Editorial as Editor-in-Chief of *Circulation*, Hill¹ said, “rather, we will focus on the impact of an article on advancing clinical practice”.

Unfortunately, reliance on the Journal Impact Factor (JIF; Clarivate Analytics; Philadelphia [PA], United States) by many employers and funding agencies worldwide has created a dependence on this evaluation measure, potentially compromising creativity, novelty, and academic freedom.² A focus on the JIF leads journals to favour reviews, and editors of such journals may be pressured to publish more reviews or special issues to maintain their JIF and associated prestige of the journal, to attract maximum citations. Because JIF is sometimes used inappropriately as a surrogate to measure the importance of the individual manuscripts or authors published in a journal, this can affect decisions of scientists and their funders. It has been suggested that high-impact journals maintain their status by publishing special or invited reviews, to increase the number of citations.³ Another difficulty that authors face is that many journals require pre-submission correspondence for unsolicited manuscripts. These are then reviewed by the editors before the manuscript can be submitted for peer review. This

wastes the valuable time of the author, and maybe that of the journal itself.

To ensure valuable knowledge reaches diverse readers, journals should consider ethical values and not only maintain their JIF through invited articles.^{3,4} They should also increase the breadth and number of subjects and article types. Journals can increase quality through following best editorial practices and increase visibility through providing open access articles.

Author contributions

S Salman contributed to the concept or design and prepared the initial draft of the manuscript, FH Shah did the literature review and prepared the final draft of the manuscript. All authors had full access to the data, contributed to the study, approved the final version for publication, and take responsibility for its accuracy and integrity.

Conflicts of interest

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Response from Editor in Chief

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To the Editor—We thank Dr Salman and Dr Shah for their letter. I agree that transparency and responsiveness are essential qualities for academic journals to strive for. HKMJ endeavours to follow the Principles of Transparency and Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing,¹ and is constantly making improvements to this end. HKMJ also promotes effective and rapid correspondence during the submission process, and accepts Editorials, Letters, and Commentaries so that readers may engage with authors in post-publication discussion and review.

It has long been known that review articles attract relatively high rates of citations, primarily because they gather information from a variety of sources and provide a convenient newer citation for older research.² Furthermore, as Clarivate note in their literature on the Journal Citation Reports, the journals with the highest JIF in any given field (not only medicine) are typically review-only journals.³ For HKMJ and many other journals, invited reviews, editorials, and other educational article types are essential, and are intended to draw the reader's attention to original research of interest that has been published not only in our own journal, but in others, too.

The value of the JIF remains contentious.⁴ The JIF provides a convenient and reasonable metric by which a journal can be judged; however, this does not necessarily reflect the quality and clinical significance of papers published in that journal. HKMJ supports the San Francisco Declaration on

Research Assessment, which aims to prevent misuse of the JIF and advocates article-level metrics, rather than a single journal-level metric.⁵

HKMJ supports removing barriers for authors wherever possible; however, pre-submission inquiries are required for potential Medical Practice articles, and HKMJ does not accept unsolicited Editorials. We believe it benefits both authors and journal to respond to such inquiries quickly, because the many in-house checks, including for plagiarism, author guidelines, and other standards, are unnecessary at the pre-submission stage. The usual response time for pre-submission enquiries to HKMJ is less than 24 hours, whereas it takes around 2 weeks for the average rejection. This rapid response means that authors can much more quickly choose an alternate journal should their paper be deemed unsuitable.

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