

Reaching out from Scientific Periphery: Five Years of Croatian Medical Journal

The last (No. 4/96) issue of *Croatian Medical Journal (CMJ)* brought three changes to life. The first was the new layout of the journal, designed by Dr Mladen Petrovecki. The changes were subtle but we believe they improved the overall look and presentation of the journal.

New Editorial Board

The second change was the reconstruction of the Editorial Board. Over the years, we have been receiving more and more articles from international authors, i.e., the authors affiliated with non-Croatian institutions. For example, the ratio of domestic to foreign manuscripts arriving to the *CMJ* office changed from 3.4:1 in 1992 to 1:1 in 1996. We felt that a change in the editorial board was necessary to reflect this fact and to improve the quality of the journal. The Editorial Board now includes 35 members from 15 countries, covering all continents. We thank them all for joining us in our quest for a better journal and science presented in it. We expect them to criticize us, advise us, and work with us on all matters regarding the quality of articles, and the future short- and long-term development of the journal. Our new collaborators have the characteristics needed for an editorial board member; these characteristics were recently listed in *British Medical Journal* (1): international recognition, academic excellence, broad view of medicine, creative thinking, international orientation, willingness to work on a journal, agreeability and flexibility, team-orientation, and some knowledge of journals. With the new Editorial Board, we also hope to get promoters of *CMJ* in other countries, and help in acquisition of new contributions and finding high-quality reviewers. In this way we should achieve greater international recognition.

1995 Impact Factor

The visibility of *CMJ* is still small when judged by the impact factor calculated from the *Science Citation Index (SCI)* only. We are aware that the impact factor may not be an absolute measure of journal quality and visibility, as was recently debated for other fields (2), but we decided to accept it as a general indicator of where we are and where we should go. During 1995, *CMJ* received 6 citations in the articles which were published in "citing" journals and were related to documents published by *CMJ* in 1993 and 1994. As the number of our citeable documents ("source items") published in 1993 and 1994 was 89, this gave *CMJ* the 1995 bibliographic impact factor of 0.067. However, this is the impact factor calculated only for *SCI*; we are aware of several citations in journals covered by the *Social Science Citation Index* but the access to that database or the Journal Citation Reports where we could possibly find *CMJ* among the "cited-only" journals, is not available to us. We hope to be able to do this type of search in the near future. We have still been receiving a rather constant number of citations in journals relevant to the topics published in *CMJ* and indexed in other publications of the Institute for Scientific Information (Current Contents), and in *Medline*.

Sorting *CMJ* Archives

The coming International Congress on Peer Review in Biomedical Publication (Prague, Czech Republic) in September this year prompted us to sort our old files and evaluate the review process in the past five years (1992-1996). Rather unexpectedly, it took a lot of work, but we have learned a lot on how to keep an archive complete and updated. We presently work on the full presentation of the collected data. The data turned quite interesting. What we can say now (with statistical confidence!) is that review process became shorter over the years, i.e., we became more efficient in processing the manuscripts, and that both domestic and foreign (non-Croatian) manuscripts received the same (fair) review treatment.

Croatian International Publications

The third change was the introduction of a new section: Croatian International Publications (CIP). This section was envisioned as a comprehensive overview of the articles by Croatian authors (i.e., publications with Croatian address in affiliations) published in respectable international journals. This

is particularly important for the members of the World Association of Croatian Physicians (*WACP*), because in that way they can learn about the research going on in Croatia and look for a possible cooperation.

We are aware that all good works by the Croatian researchers are not possible to be presented within two *CMJ* pages allocated for CIP. This raised the problem of selection criteria for CIP. Scientists are prone to the “fear from ranking”, so we wanted to set the criteria that would reduce this as much as possible, but still present the best of Croatian biomedicine.

The search for publications with Croatian addresses that appeared in *SCI* in the 8-month period (January-August 1996) was done on a *SCI* compact disc in the Central Medical Library of the Zagreb School of Medicine. There were ~500 cited publications, from which we selected 141 biomedical titles. After excluding conference abstracts, letters and editorials, the total of 82 titles were available, enough to cover eight *CMJ* issues (we allocated two *CMJ* pages to the CIP section, and keep the right to shorten and edit the abstract of the publication). It could be argued that we missed valuable articles not covered by *SCI*. This is true, but we felt we could narrow our selection to *SCI* because it cites the most relevant journals in the fields that are easily available to scientific community. *SCI* is searchable by the author's address, making the search simple and exact. The selection of CIP articles was partly based on the journals' impact factors. The impact factor of the articles selected for the last CIP ranged from 0.24 (*Archives of Orthopaedic and Trauma Surgery*) to more than 5 (*Journal of Bone and Mineral Research*) with an average impact factor of 1.391 ± 1.035 . However, by adhering only to the impact factor rule we might miss the main point of CIP – to present to the *CMJ* readers good-quality work in all the fields of biomedical research and (when appropriate) to emphasize the research in the specific fields (e.g., epidemiology, social medicine, anthropology). The impact factors of journals from various research fields differed, making the direct comparison of journals impossible. One of the ways of judging the quality of a journal is a field-coefficient which represents the ratio between the average *SCI* impact factor and the average impact factor of a particular research field (4). To normalize the quality of journals from different branches, the impact factor of the respective journal is divided by the field-coefficient.

For the first CIP selection, we neither ranked the articles according to the above rule, nor calculated the partial authorship (4). Instead, we combined the highest ranking papers (median impact factor 3.27, range 2.84-5.24) with papers that covered specific Croatian topics published in journals appearing on our high-rank list (impact factor range 2.32-2.44). Thus, the first CIP list was based on both objective and personal judgments. The concept of “normalized” impact factor seems more reasonable and appropriate for the purpose of CIP – to equally represent all biomedical research fields, without the “fear of ranking” whatsoever. We will use it in our future selections. In the meantime, the CIP column in this *CMJ* issue presents another set of the highest-ranking papers with Croatian address (impact factor 1.66-2.86) that appeared in *SCI* from January to August 1996. The time-lag of 6-12 months is determined mainly by the *SCI* CD release. Our *SCI* searches indicate that we are going to have a substantial selection pool of good-quality papers in almost all branches of biomedical research. We welcome your comments and suggestions.

A last minute change: this January, the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (the so-called Vancouver Group) introduced new uniform requirements for manuscripts submitted to biomedical journals (5). *CMJ* draws on these requirements, and the readers are encouraged to study our new, more detailed Instructions to Authors at the end of this issue.

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