

Saudi Medical Journal - 30 years

Saudi Medical Journal (SMJ) was founded in July 1979, as one of the leading scientific educational journals in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Eastern Mediterranean Regional countries. It has achieved major success over the last 30 years, and kept up with all the innovations in the medical fields, and medical technology. First, we established the Saudi Medbase, to save all the data published since SMJ was founded, and to facilitate the search for each article including the institution, the author, and the title. Secondly, we established the SMJ website (www.smj.org.sa), which includes all SMJ publications from January 2000 to date on a free access basis. Thirdly, is the great success achieved through obtaining SMJ indexing in PubMed in 2000, which was made possible by the great effort of the editorial staff. Since then the challenge has been for SMJ to compete with the international journals after indexing. We focused on the standard of publications, and we felt the necessity to limit the number of articles with a low level of evidence (case reports and brief communication). The submitted manuscripts undergo high competition to be accepted, subsequently, our rejection rate is very high.

After indexing we noticed the increasing popularity of the journal, which lead to an increased number of submissions. Although we are proud of this, it has put a lot of pressure on the SMJ staff. Several steps have been taken to overcome such a burden, in particular, we increased the number of staff members, which is difficult when the journal is not self-sufficient. We also face the continuing problem of ethical misconduct, which we referred to in our editorial of last year. It has become routine that we receive correspondence related to an article previously published in our journal (either the primary or secondary publisher), with ethical issues that need to be resolved with the author, and their institutions. Our policy towards ethical misconduct, as previously mentioned, and addressed in our Instructions to Authors, is consistent with the internationally accepted standards.

The number of received manuscripts has increased. During 2008, SMJ received 1575 manuscripts, published 357 (23%), and rejected 777 (49%); the remaining manuscripts are still in the processing stage (Table 1). All accepted manuscripts are subjected to tracking of each paragraph for plagiarism and duplicate publication, after which some of the papers are rejected, for others, the authors are asked to redraft in their own words, or to reference specific statements. This process is exhausting to the editorial staff, but we have managed to discover several cases of ethical misconduct prior to publication. This year we expanded our reviewers list, ensuring that the reviewer is from a different country, trying to avoid any potential bias. Our time limit is 4 weeks for the review, and the response rate, as shown in Table 2, is 61% before the due date, 27% delayed, and 12% with no reply. We are always keen to have the reviewer's opinion. One of the aspects that we are striving to improve is the time taken from receipt of the manuscript to its publication. A summary of the current time frame is shown in Table 3.

Table 1 - Number of articles for the year 2008.

| Submission | Published articles (%) | Rejected articles (%) | Still in process (%) |
|------------|------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| 1575 | 357 (23) | 777 (49) | 441 (28) |

Table 2 - Reviewers reply for the year 2008.

| Before due (%) | Delayed (%) | No reply (%) |
|----------------|-------------|--------------|
| 950 (61) | 420 (27) | 195 (12) |

Table 3 - Average time frame for the year 2008.

| Received to Acceptance (months) | Received to Publications (months) | Acceptance to Publications (months) |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 4.3 | 5.9 | 1.8 |

This year we faced some misunderstandings regarding ethical committee approval. Consent of the patient is not enough, and we insist on receiving ethics committee approval, or in the case of no ethics committee in the given institute, we ask for approval from the director of the institute to allow the data to be published, and to avoid duplication of work from the same institute. This point has been addressed in our updated Instructions to Authors, which also outlines the necessity of a signed report from a radiologist in case of x-rays, etc, in case reports.

We would like to thank our Advisory and Editorial Board members for their continuous help and advice throughout the year. This year the Editorial Board members will be subject to some changes, some members have finished their term with the SMJ, and we are welcoming a new group of editorial board members. We wish all good luck.

Saleh M. Al-Deeb, MD
Editor-in-Chief

There is always great concern about the quality of published material, and our intention is to seek high scientific quality submissions. We will broaden the reviewers list in order to reduce the processing time from submission to publication, we will cooperate with the other local journals in Saudi Arabia, to reach a standard policy regarding ethical issues and to hold regular meetings, where we can share ideas to improve publication standards in all medical journals in the Kingdom. We also have plans to upgrade the website, with improved search facilities, which will help us in future statistics to rank the most popular articles. We would like to enhance the educational content of the journal, by adding an MCQ section that will be focused for medical students and residents.

As always, we welcome regular correspondence from our readers with suggestions or comments on the journal.

Fahdah Alokaily, MD
Associate Editor