

Saudi Medical Journal during the COVID-19 era

An unpredictable year 2021 was, that began in hope and ended with fear and disappointment. A year after the pandemic, effective vaccines and boosters have become widely available. We were emerging from the worst of the pandemic to liberation from lockdown and social distancing. At the end of the year, it was shocking to know about the outbreak of the new variant of COVID-19 known as Omicron which has rapidly spread over some parts of the world. This led to an increasing number of cases which resulted in lockdown and travel restrictions. Fortunately, this is not the case in Saudi Arabia, but the number of affected people started to increase which is likely due to leniency towards the protective measures. At the end of 2021 most of the population are vaccinated, but we lack strong evidence of the degree and duration of vaccine efficacy.^{1,2}

In Saudi Arabia, the COVID-19 crisis had been well managed with prompt actions to prevent the spread of the virus. Urging public awareness, adding drive-thru COVID-19 vaccine services, and requiring full vaccinations were some of their outstanding response to aid the global pandemic.^{3,4} Saudi Arabia health officials have dedicated a tremendous effort and financial support to carry on strict regulations and strategies to protect the well being of all the population from the risks and the spread of diseases such as COVID-19 and its mutations. Therefore, the only way to return to our normal life is through mass vaccination programs. Vaccines have become available to all the people of Saudi Arabia (citizens and residents) for free. By August 2021. It has become mandatory to have 2 doses of COVID-19 vaccine before attending social,

cultural, sporting, and entertainment events, as well as entering both government and private establishments. While approaching the end of year 2021, most of the population have received 2 doses. Recently, COVID-19 vaccine booster shots have been available for anyone over 18 years of age.

Researches on COVID-19 dominated the world after the pandemic. The main mission of SMJ is to spread medical knowledge, and has contributed to the scientific field by shedding the light on this pandemic. We received more studies on COVID-19. Moreover, it has remained our priority in publication. The COVID-19 clinical presentation and vaccinations, their safety, effectiveness, and side effects were the most discussed topics. They constitute almost 25% of SMJ 2021 publications.

We believed that protective measures should continue as this pandemic may take longer than anyone would anticipate.

Website improvement. Despite all the challenges, we are moving forward with the objective of reaching the highest level of excellence. With this, we launched our new website early in the year 2021 with an innovative design and an intuitive navigation system, the new site enhances the browsing experience of our valued users. In addition, being fully optimized for mobile devices.

Withdrawal policy and authorship criteria. We face a problem with authors that is becoming frequent. At the final stage of publication, some authors ask to withdraw their manuscript when the peer review process has been completed. This request is unethical unless it contains serious errors and unreliable results. All of the Journal's effort was concentrated on completing the process in an efficient and timely manner. We have implemented our new withdrawal policy and authorship criteria in accordance with the international standards. The Editorial Office will study this request, and they will decide if it is appropriate to apply a 5-year embargo for all the authors in the manuscript, considering that all the authors are involved in the withdrawal decision. When the manuscript type is downgraded by the editor to a brief, the author may withdraw his article subject to withdrawal policy.

Authors sometimes request a change in authors order after the manuscript has been accepted or published. Generally, there is no consensus in most publications, but as recommended by the Committee on Publication Ethics, authors should discuss authorship order before publishing and documenting their decisions in writing.

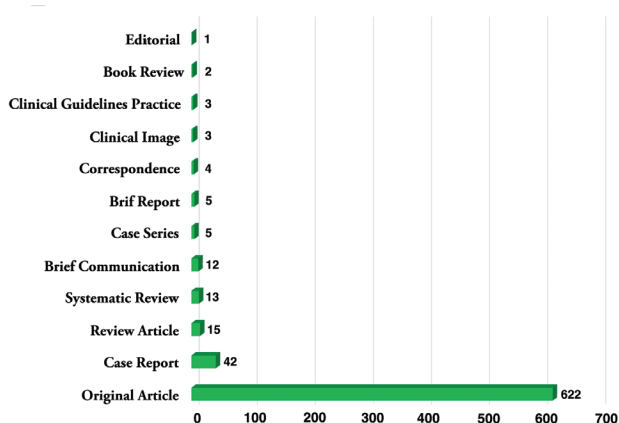


Figure 1 - Type of manuscripts received for the year 2021.

Table 1 - Origin of “peer-reviewed” articles published in the Saudi Medical Journal for the year 2021.

Origin	n	%
KSA	146	(81.1)
Jordan	4	(2.2)
Turkey	8	(4.4)
Egypt	3	(1.7)
Bosnia	1	(0.6)
UAE	1	(0.6)
China	6	(3.3)
Italy	1	(0.6)
France	1	(0.6)
Pakistan	3	(1.7)
India	1	(0.6)
Malaysia	1	(0.6)
Korea	2	(1.1)
UK	2	(1.1)
Total	180	(100.0)

All authors should be aware of the corresponding author’s role.

Journal’s indexation. An indexation indicates a high level of quality in a journal, and indexed journals are generally more likely to present high quality scientific content than non-indexed journal. Saudi Medical Journal is indexed in a wide variety of indexation services, including MEDLINE/Index Medicus (National Library of Medicine), PubMed, PubMed Central, SCOPUS, EMR Index Medicus, EBSCO Information Services, Excerpta Medica Database (EMBASE), BIOBASE, GALE/CENGAGE Learning, ProQuest, and ISI Web of Knowledge. The Journal is also a member of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) since 2011.

Google analytic. Our Google analytic results show that more than 90000 users visited our website from January 2021 through December 2021, which represents a 42% increase over the compared year of 2020. During the period of January-December of 2021, the top 6 countries where the sessions originated were Saudi Arabia, United States, China, Turkey, India, and the United Kingdom. Based on our website audience statistics, young doctors aged 18-34 represented the majority of website visitors.

Table 2 - Average processing time frame of articles published in the Saudi Medical Journal for the year 2021.

Year	Received to Acceptance (Months)	Acceptance to Publications (Months)	Received to Publications (Months)
2021	2.7	1.2	3.9

Annual statistics. This year we received 727 manuscripts of which we processed 279 articles that have fulfilled the Journal’s requirements (Figure 1). In the past 12 months, we have published one Editorial, 3 Systematic Reviews, and 120 Originals, with a total of 1354 pages. Approximately 81.1% of the papers we published were from the Saudi Arabia (Table 1). Our total rejection rate was 82% of which 60% were rejected at the initial decision. The average processing time frame of Original Articles in the year 2021 from received date to acceptance was 2.7 months, from acceptance to publication 1.2 months, and from received to publication 3.9 months (Table 2). We take pride in our latest Journal Impact Factor of 1.5 that continues on a steady-rise.

We wish to express our sincerest appreciation to our referees for their valuable contribution in improving the quality of the paper that we publish. On behalf of the editorial team, we would like to thank everyone for all their support, allowing us to continue the brand of excellence we are committed to. We are looking forward to wish everyone success in the coming year ahead.

References

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Fahdah Alokaily, MD
Editor-in-Chief

Our thanks goes to the reviewers who have participated in the excellent review of manuscripts and books for the year 2021.

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