

ONLINE EDITION OF A JOURNAL: A GREAT SOURCE OF MANUSCRIPTS & POTENTIAL REGIONAL COOPERATION

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ABSTRACT

Background: Pakistan Journal of Medical Sciences (Pak J Med Sci) formerly known as 'Specialist', is a quarterly journal, published since 1984. It is indexed by EMBASE/Excerpta Medica and WHO Extra MED but not by Medline. Even though the journal is being published regularly for the last 22 years, its online full-text edition was introduced only in late 2002.

Objective: We have assessed the impact of online edition of PJMS on the number of manuscripts received internationally, along with the improvement in the visibility of the journal during the last three years. The findings are presented here along with the proposals for the potential cooperation between the countries of the region.

Results: We started receiving increased number of manuscripts internationally in 2003 and this gratifying trend continues even today. In 2003, we received 37 manuscripts which increased to 62 in 2004 and 133 in 2005 (an increase of + 300% vs. 2003). Initially, the authors from 10 countries were involved. Now this number has increased to 22. The geographical spread is as wide as four continents. Online submission of articles has also increased from within the country during this period. Taking Iran as an example of the contributing countries (as the authors from Iran have been our major contributors), we received 13 manuscripts in 2003, increasing to 21 in 2004 and 74 in 2005. The acceptance rate for the publication of articles from Iran has varied from 30 - 47% each year. Positive attitude of editorial staff and the helpful approach on the part of reviewers has facilitated the increase in the acceptance rate. This shows regional co-operation.

Manuscripts from any country can have deficiencies. Those received from Iran have had their share of discrepancies. These discrepancies have ranged from problems with poor English, to inconsistency of format and quality of references and disregard for the 'instruction to authors'. Significant delays occur in the processing of articles due to too much time taken by the authors to give the feedback to the queries of reviewers and the return of proof-read articles, amongst many other elements.

Conclusions: We feel that online edition of a journal not only helps to increase the visibility of the journal but also proves to be a great source of manuscripts, even without indexing by Medline, provided the regularity and standard of the journal is maintained. In addition, it is an important potential source of coordination between the regional countries to work together for the training of writers, reviewers and editors to improve the standard of medical journalism, and thus improve the standards of medical journals in the region.

KEY WORDS: Online Journals, Manuscripts, Regional Cooperation.

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INTRODUCTION: Several medical journals the world over have their online editions for many years. However it is a relatively new phenomenon in EMRO region. Pakistan

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Journal of Medical Sciences (PJMS), formerly known as 'Specialist', has been published since 1984. It is indexed by EMBASE/ Excerpta Medica and WHO Extra MED but not by Medline. Even though the journal has been published regularly every quarter for the last 22 years, it is only recently, in late 2002, the online edition was introduced.

We have assessed the impact of online edition of Pakistan Journal of Medical Sciences on the visibility of the journal and on the number of manuscripts received from international sources, during the last three years. The

findings of the assessment are presented in this article as well as the suggestions for the improvement of potential cooperation between the countries of the region.

RESULTS: *The visibility & the number of manuscripts:* Since going online three years ago, there has been a steady increase in the number of hits at PJMS website (www.pjms.com.pk). Presently, there are over 257,000 hits per month (8600 hits per day). The number of pages viewed has gone up to 60,000 per month.

The number of manuscripts received from Pakistan and international sources during 2003 to 2005 are shown in Fig-1 and Fig-2.

From 37 manuscripts received in 2003¹, the number has increased to 133 in 2005 (an increase of over 300%). Initially the authors from 10 countries were involved. In 2005 the number increased to 22. The geographical spread of these countries is as wide as the four continents. Fourteen countries in Asia, majority being from EMRO region, three countries in Africa, three in Europe and two in North America have sent their manuscripts. (Table-I). Online submission of articles has also modestly increased (12%) from within the country during this period. The practice of online review has also been started.

Country-specific Example: Iran has contributed the major share of the articles. We received 13 articles (29%) in 2003¹, 21(34%) in 2004² and 74(56%) in 2005. The acceptance rate of the articles from Iran has varied from 30% to 43%

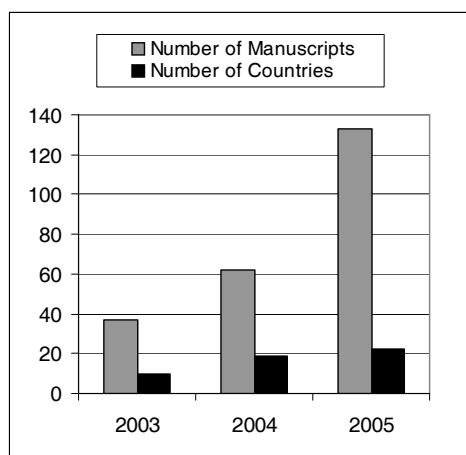


Fig-1: The number of the manuscripts received from overseas and the number of countries from 2003 - 2005.

each year. Positive attitude of accommodation on the part of the staff and helpful approach of the reviewers has played a significant role to facilitate the increase in acceptance rate. The editorial staff and reviewers will not reject the articles on flimsy grounds like poor English or typographical/grammatical mistakes. They would even re-write the manuscript without compromising their respective writing style.

Discrepancies of manuscripts: Manuscripts from any source can have discrepancies. Those received from Iran have had their share of it. These discrepancies have ranged from problems with poor to very poor English, inconsistencies of the format and quality of references and disregard for the 'instruction to authors'. Too lengthy articles with too many illustration and tables, poor quality figures and photographs are some of the other problems. Statistical analysis is another weak area. Significant delays occur in the processing of articles due to too much time taken by the authors to give the feedback to the queries of reviewers and the return of proof-read articles, amongst many other elements while the eagerness on the part of the authors for speedy publication of their articles is a constant feature.

DISCUSSION: Our experience with going online is a fresh one. We are excited with the gratifying results of increased visibility and the manuscripts since we have gone online. Even though Pakistan Journal of Medical Sciences(Pak J Med Sci) is not indexed by

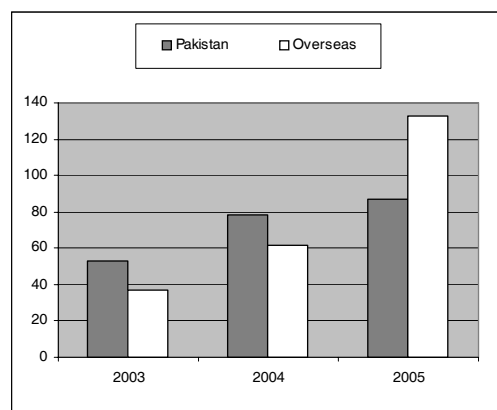


Fig-2: The number of the manuscripts received from Pakistan and overseas from 2003 - 2005.

Medline, going online has helped us to 'internationalize' the journal. We expect that other journals who are already online for a long time probably have similar experiences; however we feel that with the new experience giving us good results emphasizes the importance of online edition of any journal². More journals should opt for their online editions. This is particularly important from a regional perspective. It opens up avenues for the authors to have more options to select journals to send their manuscripts to. This can be a great source of sharing the regional cooperation within the countries. Within the region there is likely to be a better understanding on the part of the editors about the difficulties faced by the authors. This is likely to invite more helpful attitude from the editors and reviewers. The establishment of EMAME will also provide increased opportunities for cooperation and collaboration between the editors of regional medical journals.³

Online medical journals provide easy access to the researchers to medical literature from developing countries and also help improve their citation rate in the medical literature. With the availability of online full text medical journals, indexing in Medline is likely to become less significant. In future the issue will not be indexation or non-indexation in Medline but more so the frequency of the citations of the articles.⁴

New avenues are opening up for the increased visibility of online medical journals.

Table-I: Geographical Spread

<i>Asia</i>	<i>Africa</i>	<i>Europe</i>	<i>North America</i>
Bangladesh	Cameroon	Ireland	Canada
India	Nigeria	Poland	USA
Nepal	Tunisia	UK	
Iran			
Iraq			
Jordan			
Kuwait			
Lebanon			
Palestine			
Qatar			
Saudi Arabia			
UAE			
Thailand			
Turkey			

One such avenue is Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ). It contains free full text quality controlled scientific and scholarly journals, over 650 in number. The primary aim of DOAJ is to increase the visibility and ease of use as a references source, thus promoting increased usage and impact.⁵ It is maintained by Lund University Library, Open Society Institute Budapest and supported by Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resource Coalition (SPARC). Pakistan Journal of Medical Sciences is a member of Open Access Journals.

Identification of discrepancies in the manuscripts from a country or a groups of countries would be a stimulus to take steps to minimize or even eliminate the deficiencies through training of writers, reviewers and editors to improve the standards of medical journalism. The steps can and should be taken at the country level but more importantly at the inter-country and regional level. The assistance from WHO EMRO will play a vital role in these activities. This will help in improving the standards of the medical journals in the region.

CONCLUSIONS: Online edition of a journal not only helps to increase the visibility of the journal but also it can be a great source of manuscripts from international sources, provided the regularity and the standard of the journal is maintained. More and more journals should strive to go online. It is a potential source of cooperation between the regional countries to work together for the training of writers, reviewers and editors to improve the standards of medical journalism and thus improve the standards of the medical journals in the region.

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