

The Malaysian Journal of Medical Sciences in Its 18th Year: A Look at the Journal's Growth

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Abstract

As a small—although growing—journal based in Malaysia, the *Malaysian Journal of Medical Sciences (MJMS)* has faced several challenges in the past, such as promoting our journal as well as making sure our article bank does not go empty. However, we strive to improve ourselves by taking all means necessary to increase the quantity and, most importantly, quality of our publications, as well as to increase our journal's visibility and citability. This editorial will focus on *MJMS* statistics throughout 2011—where *MJMS* turned 18—as well as future plans for our journal.

Keywords: manuscripts, publishing, reports, special events, statistics

Introduction

The year 2011 marked the 18th anniversary of the *Malaysian Journal of Medical Sciences (MJMS)*. In human years, 18 is the start of the transitional phase from adolescence to adulthood, and over the years, *MJMS* has experienced tremendous growth to become one of the top 10 Malaysian journals in the medical field as well as in the top 20 of all Malaysian journals (1). To celebrate our anniversary, a fresh, purple-themed cover was introduced for the then newly published *MJMS*: Volume 18, Issue 1. A month later, in February 2011, we received an excellent gift from PubMed: *MJMS* had been accepted for indexing in the renowned biomedical database. This indexing allows greater visibility and citability of our publications, to the benefit of the scientific community in general as well as *MJMS* and our contributors in particular. This editorial will provide a look at our 2011 submission and publication statistics and our future plans for *MJMS*.

The “In” Box: Manuscript Submission and Review

New submissions

Since the introduction of the online manuscript submission via ScholarOne Manuscripts in June 2009, the number of submissions has been increasing year by year. The total number of submissions in 2011 were 195, 30.0% more than the figure reported in the previous 2009–2010 audit (2). On average, we received 16 manuscripts each month, with peaks in the middle and the end of the year (Figure 1). The majority of the submissions were original articles (60.0%), followed by case reports (27.2%) (Figure 2). Submissions were received from all continents, especially among the Asian countries (Table 1). As with the previous 2009–2010 audit (2), we received most contributions from Malaysia, followed by India and Iran.

Pre-review screening

In the middle of 2010, *MJMS* introduced a stricter pre-review screening. Previously, a manuscript was checked for suitability and formatting; now, a compulsory plagiarism screening is enforced. This is to ensure that all manuscripts are original and have good readability before they are forwarded to our reviewers.

In the 2011 pre-review screening, a total of 104 manuscripts (53.3%) were unsubmitted and returned to the authors. This high unsubmission rate was mainly because of detection of minor “copy and paste” texts (which we assumed that authors had unintentionally left in the final version of their manuscript), authors’ failure to follow the journal’s format, as well as incomplete

submission of the required files. We understand that some of the authors are submitting for their first time and/or are not familiar with our requirements, and it is one of *MJMS* visions to help authors from developing countries to publish their works; therefore, we had chosen to unsubmit—with additional guidelines given—rather than reject these papers prior to review. Authors are allowed to re-submit their works; however, only 63 manuscripts (60.6%) were

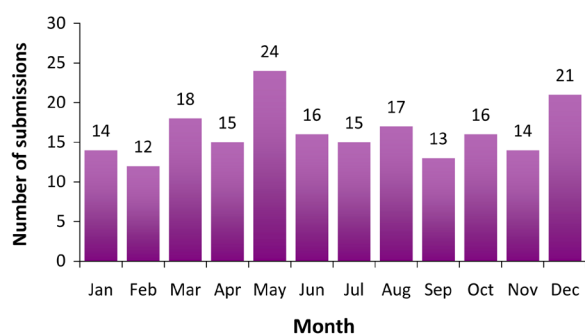


Figure 1: Submission of manuscripts to the Malaysian Journal of Medical Sciences from 1 January to 31 December 2011, according to month of submission.

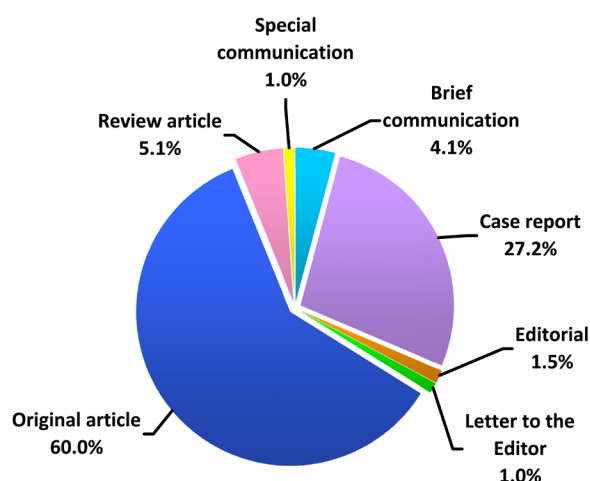


Figure 2: Submission of manuscripts to the Malaysian Journal of Medical Sciences from 1 January to 31 December 2011, according to manuscript type.

Table 1: Submission of manuscripts to the Malaysian Journal of Medical Sciences from 1 January to 31 December 2011, according to geographical region

Region	Number
South-East Asia	
Malaysia	93
Indonesia	2
Thailand	1
South Asia	
India	43
Bangladesh	4
Pakistan	2
Middle East	
Iran	23
Palestine	4
Iraq	2
Saudi Arabia	2
Armenia	1
Jordan	1
Oman	1
East Asia	
Japan	1
Africa	
Nigeria	6
Cote d’Ivoire	1
Europe	
United Kingdom	2
Germany	1
North America	
United States	1
South America	
Brazil	1
Cuba	1
Oceania	
Australia	2
Total	195

re-submitted and sent for review.

In addition, the pre-review rejection rate had increased from 16% (2) to 26.1%. The majority of these rejections were due to plagiarism (14 manuscripts), whereas the other were rejected because their contents were unsuitable for publication in our journal (4 manuscripts).

Peer-review and decisions

The average number of days for a manuscript to receive its first peer-review decision was 33.9 days (SD 16.8). Most of these first decisions were either major revisions (46.1%) or rejections (46.1%). The overall rejection rate has increased from 51.7% (2) to 62.7%, and original article have the highest rejection rate (69.8%) (Table 2). Some of the reasons cited for rejections were lack of novelty and significance, inaccurate analysis, poor presentation of findings, and lack of in-depth discussion. Many reviewers had also commented on the quality of English of these manuscripts, a problem that has been lingering for quite some time.

The “Out” Box: Publication

From the 2011 submissions, 41 manuscripts (37.3%) were accepted for publication, making the total number of manuscripts in our article bank 51. The average number of months from acceptance to publication was 4.3 months (SD 2.0), a slight reduction from the 2009–2010 figure, 4.7 months (2). Starting in October 2011, all manuscripts accepted for publication are uploaded for preview on our website. Therefore, the long wait for a print or e-publication in an assigned issue is no longer a problem as the

content is made available shortly after acceptance. The accepted manuscripts are usually assigned according to their topics, as we like to have a balance between clinical and research papers, and their accepted dates. We had increased the number of publications per year from 48 in 2010 to 56 in 2011. Timeliness had also improved: Volume 18 issues were finalised and published within the first month of their respective publication dates.

Overall Review and Future Plans

The number of manuscripts submitted and the equally high number of manuscripts rejected can be interpreted in many ways, for example, stricter review criteria and competitiveness. However, we worry if this might be a sign of a decrease in the quality of manuscripts submitted by authors. There is a substantial pressure among researchers to publish as many papers as possible and to publish them quickly. As a result, some authors submit carelessly written manuscripts of poorly designed studies; some even resort to plagiarising other articles to complete theirs. Our editorial team and our reviewers work hard to ensure that the quality of articles published in *MJMS* are of an international standard.

The next mountain that we are planning to conquer is getting into the Thomson Reuters’ scientific database, which indexes “the world’s most important and influential journals” (3) and has a very rigorous selection process. Many qualitative and quantitative factors such as publishing standards, citation data, and internationality are evaluated; therefore, the MJMS team will need to improve our journal in these aspects.

Table 2: Final decisions of manuscripts submitted to the Malaysian Journal of Medical Sciences ^a, according to manuscript type

Type	Total	Accepted		Rejected	
		n	%	n	%
Original article	63	19	30.2	44	69.8
Case report	28	11	39.3	17	60.7
Review article	8	3	37.5	5	62.5
Brief communication	5	2	40.0	3	60.0
Editorial	3	3	100.0	0	0.0
Letter to the Editor	2	2	100.0	0	0.0
Special communication	1	1	100.0	0	0.0
Overall	110	41	37.3	69^b	62.7

^a The analysis included manuscripts with an original submission date and a final decision date from 1 January to 31 December 2011 only. ^b Out of 69 manuscripts, 47 were rejected in the first round of review, 4 were rejected in subsequent reviews, and 18 were rejected pre-review (14 due to plagiarism and 4 due to unsuitable submissions).



Figure 3: Malaysian Journal of Medical Sciences Quick Response Code.

To enhance the quality and quantity of publications, especially among developing countries, a “challenge” was submitted on the Scientists Without Borders website at the end of 2010. We are pleased to have received good responses from scientists of various fields who volunteered to review and edit for *MJMS*. We would like to express our sincere gratitude to our reviewers and editors for their contributions.

MJMS has also taken part in educating the research community, especially those in Universiti Sains Malaysia, on the various aspects of a good publication—from writing and technical tips, to what the reviewers and editors look for in a manuscript. We believe that, as the publishing world goes digital, researchers should also equip themselves with knowledge of digital technology (or at least have assistants who do so).

Our journal has been online since 1995, and we have been progressing digitally ever since. The print version of Volume 19 will be displaying our Quick Response Code (Figure 3); our readers will be able to access our website from their mobile devices and download articles for references. We also plan to assign digital object identifiers to all articles; this will help increase accessibility and citability of our publications by having permanent

links and cited-by linking. Furthermore, our publisher, the Universiti Sains Malaysia Press, is tapping into the possibility of our journals (including *MJMS*) going mobile through iPad and Android devices, although it may take some time to develop the application. We look forward to seeing our journal fully available anytime, anywhere, and on any platform in the future.

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