

Impactful research over impact factor

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Scientific research publications have evolved from a scientific necessity to a personal achievement for scientists. A researcher's success is commonly measured, not only by the number of publications he or she has, but also the impact factor (IF) of the journals they are published in. Customarily, publications in high impact factor journals are regarded as career milestones and are considered for employment opportunities or promotions.

The IF of a journal is based on the number of citations for an average article published in that particular journal within a year (1). The IF has become the principal objective evaluator of scientific journals. However, there have been growing concerns over the IF in the recent past. The principal concern surrounding this controversy is whether the IF reflects upon how the research influences the community or changes the practice. Most high IF journals fall into a pattern of accepting a certain type of publications which are likely to get cited, resulting in ignoring the work that have more beneficial and practical implications for the masses. For example, a paper on molecular evolution of colorectal cancer using next generation sequencing would get accepted to a high IF journal while a descriptive study on the disease pattern of CRC in a South Asian population may not have a similar chance of acceptance. As much as the molecular evolution provides insight into basic science, the disease pattern (which is less well documented) in a population that accounts for over a quarter of the world's population may have more practical implications in screening and prevention of CRC over the next few decades. Emerging evidence of a significantly high prevalence of young and early onset CRC in South Asia with a vast majority arising in the left colon demonstrated this contrast from the conventional descriptions based on western data (2,3).

Currently the IF is calculated by Clarivate, a publicly traded analytical company with several subscription bases products. Also, the exuberant article processing charges (APC; ranging

from 500 to 12000 USD) some of the high IF journals charge, limits the access to these journals for a selective group of researchers. Recently a group of editorial members resigned from the board of the journal *NeuroImage* in protest of the APC of its publisher, Elsevier (4). Due to aforementioned reasons, the IF should be looked at with caution and interpreted with care when assessing the importance of research.

DORA (declaration on research assessment) was developed in 2012 to address some of these concerns at the Annual Meeting of The American Society for Cell Biology (ASCB) in San Francisco, CA. It lays down recommendations to improve the assessment of quality of research. The key theme on the DORA recommends the elimination of (a) the use of journal-based metrics (including IF) in deciding funding, promotions or employment, (b) the need to assess research on their merit rather than the journal in which its published and (c) the need to relax limitations on publications (word limits, number of figures) by capitalising on the benefits of online publication.

As I take up the role of the Editor-in-Chief of the Sri Lanka Journal of Surgery, together with the editorial board we hope to promote impactful research amongst surgeons through the journal. The importance of research lies in its ability to influence current practice. There is a significant lack of such locally applicable data from this region (5). The journal has made a remarkable contribution to the scientific literature in Sri Lanka over the past four decades and achieved considerable growth. Hence, the SLJS provides a wholesome platform for young researchers from the region to showcase their research. We are working hard on the process of being included in the emerging sources citation index. Above all, the SLJS will focus on providing a platform for scientifically sound, impactful research with implications to the community at large. While thanking you for supporting the journal in the past, we expect your patronage in our journey to promote impactful research.

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