"Editors! Check Your Impact Factor Data!"

Letters to Dermatology Count More towards the Calculation of the Impact Factor than in Any Other Dermatology Journal

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The Impact Factor (IF) has become an important element for the evaluation of medical literature: I do not want to discuss the bias this may produce, as it has already been covered in many other publications [1–3]. I would like to inform the readers and the editorial board of *Dermatology* that the calculation of its IF is made according to different criteria than those applied to similar journals in the same field.

The calculation of the IF of this particular journal for 2001 was made as follows: the number of articles published in the *past two years* (1999 and 2000) which *were cited* in 2001, divided by the total number of papers *pub-*

lished in the two past years (1999 and 2000). Obviously with this ratio of cited/published articles, each individual item is of importance. The number of cited articles is difficult to control, and the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI) certainly provides an accurate analysis in this regard. The number of published articles is easy to count, but the question is: which articles are included in the total? The Journal Citation Report (JCR) on-line glossary claims that 'Editorials' and 'Letters' are not included in article counts 'because they are not generally cited', a fact which does probably not apply to clinical dermatology journals.

Table 1. Recalculated IF for 2001 (with or without letters)

	Cited in 2001				Published in 1999 and 2000						IF calculated without letters	IF calculated with letters
	total citations	1999	2000	1999+ 2000	without letters			with letters				
					1999	2000	1999+ 2000	1999	2000	1999+ 2000		
JAAD	12,462	773	1,074	1,847	379	410	789	<i>411</i>	<i>488</i>	<i>899</i>	2.341	<i>2.055</i>
Br J Dermatol	11,287	1,017	717	1,734	350	371	721	<i>628</i>	<i>677</i>	<i>1,035</i>	2.405	<i>1.81</i>
Arch Dermatol	10,657	624	429	1,053	182	206	388	<i>270</i>	<i>256</i>	<i>526</i>	2.714	<i>2.185</i>
Contact Dermatitis	3,942	218	93	311	267	296	563	<i>277</i>	<i>314</i>	<i>591</i>	1.016	<i>0.967</i>
Dermatology	3,266	260	161	421	<i>167</i>	<i>156</i>	<i>323</i>	223	210	433	<i>1.303</i>	0.972
Acta Derm Vener	3,232	196	92	288	98	97	195	<i>203</i>	<i>194</i>	<i>397</i>	1.477	<i>0.725</i>
Int J Dermatol	2,612	218	93	311	184	174	358	<i>234</i>	<i>248</i>	<i>482</i>	0.869	<i>0.645</i>
Clin Exp Dermatol	1,731	106	90	196	112	137	249	<i>131</i>	<i>162</i>	<i>293</i>	0.787	<i>0.669</i>
Am J Dermatopathol	1,526	169	66	235	108	89	197	<i>123</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>233</i>	1.193	<i>1.009</i>
Pediatr Dermatol	1,526	117	49	166	113	107	220	<i>140</i>	<i>135</i>	<i>275</i>	0.755	<i>0.604</i>
J Cutan Pathol	1,479	109	73	182	78	87	168	<i>86</i>	<i>92</i>	<i>178</i>	1.083	<i>1.022</i>
JEADV	424	113	42	155	76	82	158	<i>138</i>	<i>152</i>	<i>290</i>	0.981	<i>0.534</i>

Numbers are derived from the JCR on-line and were used for the calculation of the 2001 IF.
Numbers in italics have been recalculated by counting with or without letters.

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Table 2. 2001 IF based on absolute citation frequencies for 1999 and 2000 [4]

	All citations 2001	With letters		Without letters	
		published	IF	published	IF
JAAD	12,462	899	13.86	789	15.79
Br J Dermatol	11,287	1,035	10.91	721	15.65
Arch Dermatol	10,657	526	20.26	388	27.47
Contact Dermatitis	3,942	591	6.67	563	7
Dermatology	3,266	433	7.54	323	10.11
Acta Derm Vener	3,232	397	8.14	195	16.57
Int J Dermatol	2,612	482	5.42	358	7.3
Clin Exp Dermatol	1,731	293	5.91	249	6.95
Am J Dermatopathol	1,526	233	6.55	197	7.75
Pediatr Dermatol	1,526	275	5.55	220	6.94
J Cutan Pathol	1,479	178	8.31	168	8.8
JEADV	424	290	1.46	158	2.68

I was surprised to see that your journal, which in 2001 took sixth position for total citations and fifth position for citations of articles published in 1999–2000 (table 1), has a 2001 IF of only 0.972.

In order to check *which type of publication had been included in the article counts*, I analysed the data given by JCR on-line for 12 clinical dermatology journals.

Table 1 shows that the principle of not counting letters was followed for 11 of the 12 clinical dermatology journals that I checked. As suspected, I found that this was not the case for *Dermatology*, for which all letters were counted. Obviously this artificially decreases your IF by increasing the denominator in the calculation. Similarly, the ‘absolute or total citation frequencies IF’ [4] of the same group of journals show the same disparity (table 2).

You will no doubt be pleased to see that the IF of *Dermatology*, when calculated with the same criteria as

applied to the other clinical dermatology journals, rises from 0.972 to 1.303 (table 1).

This bias will probably be repeated for the IF in 2002, because in the JCR on-line the count for the current year (i.e. 2001) is 194 papers, a figure that again includes letters. The figure without letters would be 144.

I wish you good luck in trying to correct this past, present and future unfairness.

References

- 1 Adam D: The counting house. *Nature* 2002;415:726–729.
- 2 Ojasoo T: Le Facteur d’Impact des revues, un indicateur bibliométrique à manier avec prudence. *Presse Med* 2002;31:7765–7781.
- 3 Hansson S: Impact Factor as a misleading tool in evaluation of medical journals. *Lancet* 1995;346:906.
- 4 Garfield E: Citation comments. *Current Contents* 1994;25:3–7.