...."current comments"

Citation Impact Depends Upon the Paper, Not the Journal! Don't Count on 'Citation by Association'!

May 30, 1973

Because of my editorial on the Journal of Experimental Medicine (JEM), a reader has decided to submit an "immunologically oriented" manuscript to that journal. He did this, however, with the expectation that publication in JEM would somehow improve its citation history.

This reader seems to think that publication of his manuscript by a proven high-impact journal² like JEM would promote heavier citation of his work than it might otherwise earn. Undoubtedly, publication of a paper in a prestigious journal will bring the paper to the attention of a wider audience. If his manuscript is accepted, that at least means that he met the standards of its editor and referees. But unless the paper possesses those qualities that lead to high citation, publication in IEM, the New York Times, or Pravda will not really help. If by design the editor of IEM allowed the worst paper in the world to be published, it would certainly be

ignored by many more people than would ever discover it in the Journal of Irreproducible Results.3 If it is bad enough, it may be cited in a few letters of protest! On the other hand, the best paper, published in an obscure journal, will eventually find its way into the citation record. Why? Most scientists who publish today are also their own public-relations men. They will send reprints to colleagues; they will "cite" their work and their papers at meetings; they will eventually write more papers for less obscure journals. Inevitably, they and others will cite the earlier papers, and the citations will be recorded in the Science Citation Index 8 (SCI 8). Eventually, the brilliant paper, no matter where published, will be abstracted and digested-even reprinted. If it is as brilliant as this hypothetical case assumes, the heavy citation which it deserves will begin-sooner or later, depending upon how aggressive its author's PR efforts prove to be. If | these pages in CC for that purthe paper is published in one of the journals covered by CC®, it will be sooner. Then, somewhat later, it will be detected in the SCI.

My friend has risked serious publication delay by submitting his manuscript to a journal where competition for space is great and the likelihood of rejection therefore high. The author must carefully evaluate the chosen journal and seek outside views on the quality of his work if he is to avoid unnecessary delay and paper handling.

Recently I received a rejection of a paper I had presented last year.4 Now the paper will have to be modified. I will have to select a journal that will not only appreciate the content, but also the absurd and ironical fact that it will be, at this late date, the first paper ever published about Current Contents. If my main concern in writing the paper had been to have it cited by my peers, then selecting an information science journal would have been adequate. If I had been concerned about priority of discovery, then the wisest course would have been to publish in any journal with little or no publication time-lag. I've been reluctant, though often tempted, to use

pose.

- 1. Garfield, E. Journal citation studies. III. Journal of Experimental Medicine compared with Journal of Immunology; or how much of a clinician is the immunologist? Current Contents No. 23, 7 June 1972, p. M1-4.
- 2. ----- Citation analysis as a tool in journal evaluation. 178:471-79, 1972. Science Journal of Experimental Medicine ranked 36th in number of times cited in 1969 (15,484 citations), and 13th in impact (8.307) as measured by number of citations of 1967 and 1968 articles by articles published in 1969.
- 3. I, and others, frequently use this journal title in what may seem off-hand levity. This excellent journal does indeed exist. It is published quarterly by the Society for Basic Irreproducible Results (Box 234, Chicago Heights, Ill., 60411).
- 4. ----- A Weekly Subject Index for Current Contents/ Life Sciences. Paper presented at the 71st Annual Meeting of the Medical Library Association, San Diego, June 11-15, 1972.