

## The Impact Factor of *Wiener klinische Wochenschrift*

Dear Sirs,

It has just come to my attention that you published my letter to *Wiener Klinische Wochenschrift* in the March 28, 2002 issue [1, 2]. I see now that Roland Hofbauer et al have replied to my letter. There can be no doubt that there are journals that achieve a higher impact than many which are already covered in Current Contents or Science Citation Index. It is possible to calculate the impact factor for such journals using the methodology of Johannes Stegman of Berlin [3]. Journals are not selected solely on the basis of impact factors.

Hofbauer et al. seem to suggest that circulation is important in the impact factor. If that were true then JAMA and BMJ would have much higher impact.

Somehow you and the Hofbauer group feel that I am biased in supporting the use of Journal Impact Factors. But I have repeatedly made clear that they should not be used as surrogates for the evaluation of individuals. And I have publicly indicated that the two-year Journal Citation Reports (JCR) impact factor may not be appropriate for all types of journals. I have shown, however, that within journal subject categories, rankings do not change significantly even if seven or fifteen years of data are taken into account [4, 5].

You have misinterpreted me on two further points. I long ago pointed out the importance of the article-by-article citation audit [6] but that does not justify the use of the most-cited articles as the leading criterion for judging the performance of an entire journal. This is in fact a variation on using impact factors as surrogates for individual performance. However, impact factors can be normalized by a variety of criteria as has been proposed by many authors. See e.g. the work of Sen [7] and, more recently, that of Garg [8].

Finally, I cannot comprehend how you could interpret my letter to mean that I criticized your move to an electronic version. On the contrary I applaud this and agree

that free access will increase the readership of WKW articles and may also lead to increased citation.

It is disappointing to be portrayed as anti-cultural. I have repeatedly stated the importance of multi-lingual communication. But if you publish in German, Japanese, or whatever, you cannot expect a mainly English-reading audience to read and cite that work. Of course, this is partially overcome by the inclusion of English language titles and abstracts, and ideally full-text translations, but don't expect this to change your impact significantly. Only good quality and relevance to research will make a significant difference.

Sincerely, *Eugene Garfield*

### References

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