

Looking forward and looking backward - Making impact with impact factor

Devinder Mohan Thappa

The journey of my editorship started in January 2008, when the search committee headed by Dr. K. Raja Babu announced my name in the DERMACON at Chandigarh (my alma mater), for the post of Editor-Elect of the *Indian Journal of Dermatology, Venereology and Leprology* (IJDVL), to work under Dr. Uday Khopkar, the then Editor-in-Chief, for one year. In the year 2009, I took over as Editor-in-Chief. My last 5 years were full of challenges as well as achievements and here I am penning down some of them, at the time of laying down my office.

In the beginning of my editorship, I had to learn quite a bit from Dr. Uday Khopkar, regarding running of the journal, manuscript handling, planning of symposiums, supplements, and generate resources for the journal. At that time, the images had to be received in the Editor's office in a compact disc (CD) and creating an issue of journal was really tough. However, with the passage of time, higher resolution of images of up to 4 MB could be fully uploaded at manuscript submission system facility of IJDVL, which came into force in 2010. Duplicate publication of images by authors was another challenge just at

the beginning of my tenure. E-publication section of the journal was strengthened during my tenure thereby helping us to accommodate more articles. Along with Dr. Uday Khopkar, I was also involved in editing the cherished dream project of IADV "History of IADV (1973-2009)".^[1] My editorial team was involved in bringing out "Guidelines for Dermatosurgery – Recommendations of the IADV Dermatosurgery Task Force". Moreover, the new sections – images in clinical practice and current best evidence – were introduced. Case reports were discouraged, rather put as letter to the editors or net letters. Whether these measures had any impact on scientific content can be judged by the impact factor, it has achieved in the past 4 years.

The impact factor is one of the measures for assessing the scientific contribution of a journal. It is based on the premise that if the papers published in a particular journal are cited more frequently in the scientific literature that follows, then that journal has had a greater impact on the scientific field that it relates to. Impact factor of a journal is periodically monitored by an organization called Thomson Reuters, Philadelphia. In 2009, *Journal Citation Reports* (JCR) Science edition from Thomson Reuters included 68 journals from India. Among the biomedical journals from India, IJDVL received its first impact factor (2009) of 0.976 declared in the year 2010. It was a matter of rejoice and pride for me as well as IADV members that in its first year of appearance in JCR, the journal had reached this level.^[2] This was because of the earnest efforts of Dr. Khopkar and his editorial team. Over the years, the impact factor of IJDVL has shown both upward and downward trends. To my satisfaction, it crossed the barrier of 1 in 2013 when its 2012 impact factor was declared at 1.206. Our journal is now ranked as number 37 out of 58 dermatology journals ranked by Thomson Reuters [Table 1].

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Table 1: Impact factor of IJDVL from 2009 to 2012 (for the years 2010-2013)

Year	Impact factor
2009	0.976
2010	0.932
2011	0.979
2012	1.206

IJDVL: Indian Journal of Dermatology, Venereology and Leprology

To achieve the above, my topmost priority was the selection of the articles and it was done on the basis of merit only. This was achieved by stringent editorial review and peer review process. As a team leader, I had to be tough minded, thick skinned, but with a tender heart, considering the aspirations of my readers. I have tried my best to uphold the sanctity of editorial and academic freedom for the journal and I am thankful to the Indian Association of Dermatologists, Venereologists and Leprologists (IADVL) executive for giving me complete editorial freedom.

At this time, let me introduce the landscape of publication in India that is changing at a rapid pace. These days, there is tremendous pressure on physicians to publish.^[3] This has led to the emergence of ethical problems like plagiarism, falsification, fabrication, gift-authorship, ghost-authorship, peer review bias, and conflict of interests. Then there are authors who fragment their work into multiple publications. Journal publication has also become a huge commercial enterprise and contributions made by sponsors may influence editorial decisions resulting in publication of biased works. These multiple factors have all led to a 10-fold rise in retraction of articles by journals over the past decade.^[4] The open access that was meant to solve the ills of the current system has brought in new problem of fake journals with counterfeit websites.

Another new challenge in the world of journal publishing is 'predatory publishers'.^[5] These publishers start fake journals with fictitious editors and editorial boards, which often start with the name 'world' or 'global' or 'international' in order to make an impression on authors. Once a paper gets accepted for publication, the author gets an invoice for payment and he is put in dilemma because the copyright has already been transferred and the manuscript cannot be taken anywhere else. These journals claim to be based in USA, UK, Canada, or Australia, but could really be operating from Africa or Asia (even India).^[3] Thus,

from humble and idealistic beginnings a decade ago, open access scientific journals have mushroomed into a global industry, driven by author publication fees rather than traditional subscriptions. In a sting operation conducted by *Science* in 2013, about one-third of the fake journals were found to be operating from India.^[6] Against this highly polluted publishing background, it is highly imperative that academic institutions and regulatory bodies have a system to distinguish genuine from fake publications so that honest and illustrious researchers are duly awarded. Moreover, serious researchers, especially those who are young, should not send their honest work in such journals. They may gain in the short run but will lose in the long run, as it will not add any credibility to their curriculum vitae. These rising unethical practices are a challenge for any editor and head of any institution.

Yet another thing which will bother the new editor is the news of a "Science" investigation that has uncovered a smorgasbord of questionable practices adopted by Chinese including paying for author's slots on papers written by other scientists and buying papers from online brokers.^[7] Recently, I received a letter where a China-based company wants to pay for publication of their articles.

With time, the journal has to evolve. As a new strategy to improve its visibility and generate revenue, it has been decided to make IJDVL available on the iPad platform from the January–February 2013 issue. A time will surely come, when all new as well as old members will prefer to have it on their iPad only and the possibility of getting the journal in print format will be by subscription only.

At the end of my editorship I would like to share with the readers that a scientometric analysis of Indian research output in medicine during 1999-2008 that revealed that number of research papers in dermatology from India have increased by 104% from 1999 to 2008. The research activities of most productive 15 Indian authors in medicine from 1999 to 2008 who published 135 and above papers have been analyzed. Out of those 15 most productive Indian authors in medicine, I was ranked at number 8.^[8] Probably for this reason, I was assigned the job of editor-in-chief of this premier journal of our association.

Finally, my thanks are due to all our sponsors for the 2012 print version, especially Gracewell, Galderma India Pvt. Ltd., Glaxo SmithKline (GSK), Dr. Reddy's laboratories Ltd., INVIDA, Ajanta Pharma, Palsons Derma, and Zydus Liva Health Care Pvt. Ltd., for their financial backing of this scientific activity. Special thanks are due to Systopic Labs Pvt. Ltd. for sponsoring mailing of IJDVL print issues to our members and Galderma India Pvt. Ltd. for sponsoring our website <http://www.ijdvl.com>. I take this opportunity to congratulate Drs. Reza *et al.* for winning the Bishnupriya Devi Award for best paper published in IJDVL during the year 2013.^[9] I also congratulate Drs. De D, Sarangal R, Handa S, authors of the article "The comparative efficacy and safety of azathioprine vs methotrexate as steroid-sparing agent in the treatment of airborne-contact dermatitis due to Parthenium" (Indian J Dermatol Venereol Leprol 2013; 79:240-1) for winning the Indubala Memorial Award for best paper published in IJDVL in 2013 on the subject of occupational/contact dermatitis. Last but not the least I would like to acknowledge the active and fruitful contribution of our publisher Wolters Kluwer Health Medical Research/Medknow Publications and Media Pvt. Ltd., in shaping its destiny.

From the year 2011, IJDVL has introduced three more prizes for the best case report, best letter to the editor, and best images in clinical practice, for Indian authors only. So, this year's award for the best case report (in the year 2013) goes to the article 'Argyria an unrecognized cause of cutaneous pigmentation in Indian patients: A case series and review of the literature.' by Drs. Kubba A, Kubba R, Batrani M, Pal T. (Indian J Dermatol Venereol Leprol 2013; 79:805-11); the award for the best letter to the editor goes to Drs. Khunger N, Kandhari R, for their letter titled 'Dermoscopic criteria for differentiating exogenous ochronosis from melasma' (Indian J Dermatol Venereol Leprol 2013; 79:819-21), and for best images in clinical practice to Drs. Jain A, Pai SB, Shenoi SD for their 'Exogenous ochronosis' (Indian J Dermatol Venereol Leprol 2013; 79:522-3). They get a certificate with cash awards from IJDVL for Rs. 5000/-, Rs. 3000/-, and Rs. 2000/-, respectively, as incentive to publish their best research work in our journal. Last but not the least I thank all the contributors for their unstinted support during the year, which is pivotal to the continued success and visibility of our journal.

Running any journal requires significant expenditures. In the past 5 years, the membership of IADVL has nearly doubled. In spite of the extra burden, it is a matter of pride for me and my managing editor, Dr. Rajeev Sharma, that we are leaving the journal in sound financial condition.

I sincerely thank all of you who have always encouraged me with kind words and good wishes. I hope I have lived up to your expectations in delivering a journal for 5 years from 2009 to 2013, which has helped us to better project our research in the international arena, teach more effectively our postgraduates, and raise the standards of care for our patients. I am grateful to my editorial team, contributors, reviewers (who have given selfless service), and readers. I would especially like to acknowledge the efforts of Dr. Sunil Dogra, Dr. Laxmisha Chandrashekar, and Dr. Dipankar De as associate editors, for contributing editorials and review articles, as and when requested by me. I pass on the baton to the next Editor-in-Chief, Dr. M. Ramam and wish him all the best in his future endeavors.

I take this opportunity to wish all of you a very happy, healthy, and prosperous new year!

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