

## MEDLINE® Indexing of the *Sultan Qaboos University Medical Journal* A great leap forward for biomedical research and publishing in the Gulf region

فهرسة المجلة الطبية لجامعة السلطان قابوس في ميديلاين®  
قفزة عالية للأمام في مجال البحوث الحيوية-الطبية والنشر في منطقة الخليج العربي

Sir,

I would like to extend my congratulations to the Editorial team members, authors and reviewers of the *SQUMJ* for succeeding in securing indexing of the journal in MEDLINE® (National Library of Medicine, Bethesda, Maryland, USA), the largest and most prestigious biomedical bibliographic database worldwide.<sup>1,2</sup> Published quarterly, *SQUMJ* is an internationally peer-reviewed journal which is also indexed in Scopus (Elsevier, Amsterdam, Netherlands), the Directory of Open Access Journals, the Al-Manhal database of Arab journals (Dubai, United Arab Emirates) and the World Health Organization (WHO) *Index Medicus* for the Eastern Mediterranean Region (IMEMR).<sup>3</sup> *SQUMJ* is a respected journal which attracts original high-quality submissions from Oman and other countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region, as well as Europe, Australasia and North and South America.<sup>4</sup> The achievement of acquiring indexing in MEDLINE® is indicative of the substantial improvements *SQUMJ* has made over the past decade. Furthermore, this accomplishment will help to increase the accessibility and visibility of research published in *SQUMJ* to a wider international scientific audience and is expected to result in a rise in the number of citations and submissions of original high-quality research.<sup>5</sup> Hopefully, this will in turn put Oman and the GCC region on the world map of biomedical research and publishing.

The ultimate goal of emerging biomedical journals is to achieve international acceptance and visibility through inclusion in major bibliographic databases, such as MEDLINE® or the IMEMR database. Around 636 IMEMR-indexed journals are published in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean region, originating from 22 countries and territories.<sup>6</sup> There has been a gradual rise in the number of biomedical journals from this region and, as of December 2016, there were 52 peer-reviewed IMEMR-indexed biomedical journals published in the Gulf region.<sup>6</sup> However, Middle Eastern and GCC-based journals are still confronted with several challenges, such as a lack of infrastructure and funding, limited access to new high-quality research due to low visibility and perceived poor peer-review standards.<sup>4,7,8</sup>

The National Library of Medicine grants MEDLINE® indexing following an application to the Literature Selection Technical Review Committee.<sup>9</sup> This committee convenes three times per year and examines approximately 180 journals at each meeting; subsequently, after rigorous evaluation against pre-defined criteria, only 12–15% of considered journals are recommended for indexing.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, few GCC-based journals meet the minimum requirements to be indexed in mainstream biomedical databases; including *SQUMJ*, only six of 5,634 MEDLINE®-indexed journals are from GCC countries.<sup>10</sup> It has been argued that journals from this region tend to publish poor-quality papers due to substandard peer-review processes.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, due to a dominant culture of 'publish or perish' and its resulting implications, local researchers often submit their high-quality original research to international journals with higher impact factors.<sup>7,8</sup> As such, journals from this region may find themselves competing with other recognised international journals for high-quality and original submissions.

In order to achieve international recognition and visibility, GCC-based biomedical journals should strive to secure indexing in MEDLINE® and other major biomedical databases. Editors of different journals should work together to improve the quality and accessibility of their journals by sharing their experiences, exchanging ideas and learning from one another. This could be achieved through close collaboration with the Eastern Mediterranean Association of Medical Editors and its committees.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the contributions of both authors and reviewers

are crucial to achieving this goal, by submitting original high-quality research and providing rigorous peer reviews, respectively. For *SQUMJ*, now that it has been indexed in MEDLINE® and is visible to an international biomedical audience via the PubMed database (National Library of Medicine), the journal should continue to maintain its high quality and standards.

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