

## Keynotes from the New Editor-in-Chief of *Acta Cytologica* and ‘Announcement of First Time *Cytojournal* Impact Factor for 2012 Coincides with *Cytojournal* Decade Celebration (2004–2013)’

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Dear Editor

I read with interest the editorial in *Cytojournal* by Shidham and DeMay [1] concerning their excitement at the announcement of the first-time *Cytojournal* impact factor (IF) for 2012. I would like to correlate it with your editorial in *Acta Cytologica* [2]. I would like to share my reservations with you and highlight my skepticism at the excitement expressed by Drs. Shidham and DeMay. While I acknowledge that IF is one of the most commonly used bibliometric parameters, it is not necessarily the only one or the best one. This citation indicator can be manipulated and skewed [3]. I therefore have several concerns to share with you and Drs. Shidham and DeMay.

First, their statement ‘The recently assigned IF of 1.2 announced during our decade celebration (2004–2013) is yet another additional parameter indicating journal quality’ is not necessarily a genuine reflection of the quality of their journal. Journal quality is dictated by the quality of its contents and publications with clinical applicability [3]. IF is a citation indicator and can therefore be affected by many factors not related to the quality or contents of a journal, e.g. turnover, selective inclusion of certain ‘highly citable’ articles and authors’ self-citations [3, 4]. Second, the statement ‘Open access charter increases the number

of citations per article with an ultimately positive impact for individual authors, *Cytojournal* and global readership’ means that more easily accessible articles that are not necessarily of high quality are more likely to be cited. Therefore, open access might actually cause a bias in citing articles that are free or easily accessible. The statement ‘It is observed that the work of authors who publish in open access journals with free global access is more visible and therefore has increased citations rates for all good quality articles’ might also result in a bias due to self-citations or selective citations by members of the same foundation to which the journal is affiliated as well as editors and editorial members of the same journal. Third, figure 1 in their editorial [1] illustrates that open access means pay more in order to be read! This alternative opportunity to publish in open-access journals means that accepted articles are more likely to be published faster and will thus be cited sooner. However, these factors are by no means an indication of the quality of the published articles. In addition, not all authors are able to cover the cost of payment or have the privilege of sponsorship from an institution. Finally, they stressed that their open-access policy was the main reason for their first-time IF. I agree that open

access might have played a part, but other factors played the principal role. The references in their editorial [1] indicate that manipulation by self-citations and selective citations is one factor (as an example, seven self-citations by Shidham are included). Eighty-one percent of all the citations in the reference list in the editorial were from *Cytojournal* articles and only 19% were from other journals. Similar trends can be observed in other editorials, letters to the editor and editor’s replies [4]. These are examples of manipulation by self-citations or selective citations. Clearly, this would have resulted in more citations for *Cytojournal* and thus increase IF; a quick scan of articles in previous issues showed that most of the cited articles were by Cytopathology Foundation members, the editors and editorial members of *Cytojournal*! Although most of the original articles have citations that are not biased, the letters to the editor and the editor’s replies were ‘loaded’ with *Cytojournal* citations [1, 4]. This is just one way that editors can maneuver a surge of the IF of their journal.

I agree with you that editors of other cytology journals are aware of the importance of IF and want to increase the numbers of citations in their journals not by self-citations or manipulation, but rather by increas-

ing the quality and variety of the contents [2]. As you have correctly recommended, encouraging high-quality articles such as original articles, reviews and meta-analyses, stipulating strict criteria for case reports and limiting letters should improve the IF [2]. IF should encourage 'fair' competition between cytology journals, but should not determine their contents [3]. Editors should not manipulate citations, for example by 'over-citation' in their letters and replies just to increase the IF of their journal. I therefore consider the comparison between the cytopathology journals, particularly with *Acta Cytologica*, in table 1 and figure 2 in the editorial [1] by Shidham and DeMay to be unfair!

In conclusion, I congratulate you on your new position with *Acta Cytologica* and I hope that, in your new endeavor, lessons have been learned from the experience of *Cytojournal* and other cytopathology journals. I also congratulate Drs. Shidham and DeMay for their decade celebration, but I guard against their excitement at the first-time *Cytojournal* IF. Open access might have partly helped their journal attain this new IF. It appears, however, to have been a reflection of a bias and a manipulation and does not necessarily reflect the quality of the contents of their journal or its ranking with other cytopathology journals.

## References

- 1 Shidham VB, DeMay RM: Announcement of first time *Cytojournal* impact factor for 2012 coincides with *Cytojournal* decade celebration (2004–2013). *Cytojournal* 2013;10:18.
- 2 Syrjänen K: Keynotes from the new Editor-in-Chief. *Acta Cytologica* 2013;75:543–544.
- 3 AbdullGaffar B: Impact factor in cytopathology journals: what does it reflect and how much does it matter? *Cytopathol* 2012;23:320–324.
- 4 Shidham VB, Sandweiss L, Atkinson BF: First *Cytojournal* peer-reviewer's retreat in 2006 – open access, peer-review, and impact factor. *Cytojournal* 2006;3:5.