EHJ’s new impact factor of 15.2: a global strategy is paying off

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The early days

The European Heart Journal was founded by the European Society of Cardiology (ESC) in 1980 as its first official journal.1 Starting with Desmond G. Julian as Editor-in-Chief—and with no impact factor—the journal slowly grew in importance and scientific impact, thanks to the efforts of the founding and subsequent editors, Henry E. Kulbertus, Kim Fox, and Frans van de Werf.4

When the current editorial team took over the European Heart Journal at the end of 2008, it was already an established forum for research in cardiology at large, with a respectable impact factor of 8.9. Of note, the ESC Guidelines that the journal published regularly were highly read, downloaded, and frequently cited. However, although the European Heart Journal had grown enormously since being established by the ESC, it still lagged considerably behind its American competitors, such as the American Heart Association’s Circulation and the Journal of the American College of Cardiology.

A novel strategy

The strategy of the current editorial team was to make the European Heart Journal a global journal.3 Today, scientific and medical research, in particular, has become a global activity to which scientists from all over the world contribute. While the majority of published medical science stems from the USA, European countries, and Japan, important contributions increasingly come from Asia Pacific, India, and China. Furthermore, many emerging countries have invested in research and have built modern facilities for talented scientists. This has led to an unforeseen growth in the number of manuscripts submitted to international journals.4 The number of manuscripts submitted to the European Heart Journal annually has increased from a few hundred in the 1980s to around 3500 today.5 It was obvious to us early on that a journal of premier standing could only be run by an international team, which is why we invited deputy and associate editors from the USA, Canada, Asia, Australia, and Africa. Similarly, the editorial board was complemented by recognized cardiologists and scientists from all over the world.

The ESC journal family

With the European Heart Journal, the family of specialty journals grew. Starting with Europace, a growing number of specialty journals evolved, currently reaching 13 titles plus the flagship of our surgical colleagues, the European Journal of Cardio-Thoracic Surgery. (TFL et al., The Heart Team at work – The new alliance of the EHJ and EJCTS Eur. J. Thor. Cardiovasc. Surg.6 (Figure 1). An increasing number of manuscripts are being transferred with reviews obtained by the European Heart Journal to the editors of our sister journals for consideration, and are often highly cited.7 Many manuscripts are truly better suited for specialists rather than a broad audience because they focus on technical aspects, treatments only performed by specialists, or are preliminary or hypothesis generating. Last year, 219 manuscripts were transferred, of which 56 were eventually published in Cardiovascular Research, Europace, European Heart Journal – Cardiovascular Imaging, European Heart Journal – Cardiovascular Pharmacotherapy, and the European Journal of Cardio-Thoracic Surgery.

The impact of scientific publishing

This increased scientific productivity in cardiovascular medicine has translated into enormous progress.8 For instance, while mortality in hospital was around 50% in 1955 when Dwight D. Eisenhower, then President of the United States, had his first myocardial infarction, current fatality rate is around 5%.9 This impressive change was only possible through the introduction of CCUs, and a productive interaction between academia and industry leading to the development of external and later implantable defibrillators,10,11 beta-blockers,12,13 aspirin,14 thrombolysis,15 angiotensin converting inhibitors, and eventually balloon angioplasty,16 stents, and statins.17,18 Similar developments have occurred in the areas of cardiac arrhythmias,19,20 heart failure,21 valvular heart disease,22 and prevention of cardiovascular disease.23

Assessing scientific journals

Scientific journals continue to play a crucial role in this context as they provide a forum for dissemination of novel findings and
comprehensive reviews of published data. How should scientific journals be assessed?

There have been several attempts to measure the quality, importance, and influence of a journal. Obviously, high-quality scientific publishing is a must. The peer-review process attempts to ensure the quality of originality of published manuscripts. This requires that editors and their peers, ideally three or more reviewers, provide a prompt, constructive, and unbiased assessment of the submitted work. While not perfect, the peer-review process is a good solution, and better than any other, particularly if it also involves expert statistical advice. We have ensured that the latter is in place with the nomination of a statistical editor and a team of statistical experts, and this clearly improves the quality of published research.

It is essential to remember that a journal, which is not widely read, will have little influence. In the past, the distribution of a journal was a crucial measure of its importance. Today, the number of downloads of papers more appropriately reflects the interest of the community in the respective journal. Our editors are proud that downloads from the website of the European Heart Journal have increased markedly in recent years, reaching almost 6 million in 2014 (Figure 2A). Furthermore, the number of institutions subscribing to a journal is another measure of its attractiveness and influence. Again, thanks to the increasing visibility of the European Heart Journal and the efforts of our publisher, Oxford University Press, an increasing number of universities, research facilities, and libraries subscribe to the journal (Figure 2B).

**Influence and impact**

What downloads represent for practicing cardiologists, citations represent for scientists. While the former reflects influence, the latter is a measure of impact on scientific process. Only data that are cited contribute to progress as they stimulate the work of colleagues and competitors. The most common measure of this is the impact factor, although other measures have been proposed as well. The impact factor of a given journal is the average number of citations received by indexed publications per paper published in the journal (published during the two preceding years), divided by the total number of citable items. In this context, citable items are research articles and clinical reviews—but not editorials, current opinions, or letters to the editor.

This year, the European Heart Journal received an impact factor of 15.2 from Thomson Reuters, thereby almost doubling its impact factor in the course of 6 years (Figure 3). Of note, the difference in impact between the European Heart Journal and the Journal of the American College of Cardiology and Circulation, respectively, is smaller when self-citations are not considered.

Such an impressive success was only achievable with an excellent and devoted team of deputy editors, associate editors, managing editors, and reviewers from all over the world. Indeed, we are fortunate to work with enthusiastic and experienced colleagues who...
provide balanced judgment and devote their time to helping us select the best papers. With this short editorial, the Editor-in-Chief of the European Heart Journal would like to thank all those who contributed to this success for the benefit of our readers, our society, the research community at large, and eventually our patients.

The path ahead

Where do we go from here? Several new features have recently been introduced: first, the Issue@aGlance, which summarizes each issue and puts the articles into a broader context. This feature is also available as a podcast and distributed via push mail to our readers. Second, we started a new EHJ Brief Communication article type, wherein preliminary but hypothesis-generating observations can be published. Such papers have a word count of roughly 1500, contain only one figure, and not more than 15 references. Similar to FAST TRACKs—an extremely successful and unique feature of the European Heart Journal—EHJ Brief Communications are handled within a week to first decision. Finally, we inform our followers via Twitter on a weekly basis about the most exciting papers, the Editor’s Choice articles (which are made available freely online), and other news.

In the future, we plan on working closely with the new electronic ESC Textbook of Cardiovascular Medicine, which is scheduled to appear in 2017. Furthermore, we will further improve the web platform. Above all, we aim to attract even better papers for our readers, the scientific community, and eventually our patients as an integral aspect of our desire to be a forum for scientists from all over the world.

References

6. Reference to be added in proof stage.

Figure 3 Impact factors of the most prominent cardiovascular journals over time.29


