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International Journal of Women's Dermatology



COVID-19 impacts medical journal submissions

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To the Editor:

The public health crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic critically shifted the infrastructure of the global health care system (Lai et al., 2020). The current pandemic has also resulted in an increase in the number of COVID publications. Indeed, we observed an increase in Pubmed searches performed on June 12th compared to July 18th (21,751 vs 32,963 respectively). This finding is consistent with previous literature reports highlighting the increase in publications in the midst of pandemics (Zhang et al., 2020). Correspondingly, one author (SEJ) noted a significant increase in review requests received for non-COVID related articles, between March 25 and May 1, 2020, which prompted the query as to whether this was due to an increase in reviewers declining to review or an increase in submissions.

Eighty medical journals (50 dermatology, 30 Internal medicine) were solicited by a standardized e-mail to assess whether they had had a relative decrease or increase in the number of articles submitted during COVID, by relative assessment between Spring 2020 and Spring 2019. The response rate was 15/50 (30%) for dermatologic and 7/30 (23.3%) for internal medicine specialty journals.

A two-way proportion comparison of the mean percent change in submission to dermatology (30%) versus non-dermatology (8%) journals showed no significant difference ($p = 0.27$; 95%CI: [-18.9%-47.8%]). A multivariable regression model was computed to investigate the association between the percent change in journals submission and the following variables: Journals' country of publication, impact factor, COVID incidence from each country. None of the variables were associated with the percent change of submissions ($p > 0.05$). And yet, 95% of the respondent journals experienced an increase (10.6–87%), in submissions of non-COVID (outbreak) related article, during this pandemic, by comparative analysis to the period in 2019. No difference in percent increase between dermatology and non-dermatology journals was observed ($p > 0.05$) (Table 1).

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Table 1

Characteristic patterns among academic journals during COVID-19 pandemic.

Journals name	Change in submission rate	Country of Origin	COVID Incidence rate per 100,000* (Jan-May)
IJWD	+87%	USA	0.0114
IJDVL	+56%	India	0.0008913
JDNA	+45%	USA	0.0114
Digestive Diseases and Sciences	+42.6%	USA	0.0114
Dermatitis	+40.8%	USA	0.0114
Journal of Dermatological Sciences	+38.8%	USA	0.0114
Contact Dermatitis	+35%	UK	0.0385
JAAD	+33%	USA	0.0114
JAMA Dermatology	+30%	USA	0.0114
Clinical and Experimental Dermatology	+29%	UK	0.0385
Anonymous (GI)	+28%	UK	0.0385
RMD Open	+25%	UK	0.0385
Advances in Skin & Wound care	+23%	USA	0.0114
Cutis	+23%	USA	0.0114
The Journal of Rheumatology	+17.2%	Canada	0.0415
Annals of Rheumatology	+15%	UK	0.0385
British Journal of Dermatology	+14%	UK	0.0385
Anonymous (Renal)	+10.6%	UK	0.0385
Clinics in Dermatology	+0%	Netherland	0.1
Clinical, Cosmetic and Investigational Dermatology	+0%	New Zealand	0.0324
Pigmented Cell Melanoma and Research	+0%	UK	0.0415
Arthritis and Rheumatology	-60.20%	UK	0.0385

Abbreviations: IJDVL: Indian Journal of Dermatology, Venereology and Leprology; IJWD: International Journal of Women's Dermatology; JDNA: Journal of Dermatology Nurses' Association; JAAD: Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology. *Incidence rate was calculated using (new COVID cases divided the total population) \times 100,000. Using worldwide coronavirus source website, data on the current population of each country listed on the table and the average COVID cases from Jan-May 31st 2020 was also generated.

Of note, the International Journal of Women's Dermatology (IJWD) experienced the highest increase in articles submissions during the pandemic, suggesting a potential demographic stimulus. The Women's Dermatology Society (WDS) has a larger constituency of self-identified female members (493 Female, 54 Male [951 chose not to specify]), source personal communication WDS. And, while data are limited, a recent survey study found women academicians to have higher productivity, as measured by faculty members' perceptions and experiences of student engagement and numbers of service hours per week, when compared to male counterparts (Guarino and Borden, 2017). This observation suggests one potential factor in the leading role of the WDS members in article submissions.

The COVID-19 pandemic shifted the paradigm of health care delivery. An exponential demand for telehealth modalities and services, paired with time awarded by furloughs in private practices and reduced pressure at academic medical centers for clinical productivity, may have resulted in an unprecedented opportunity for engagement in scholarly activities. The high engagement indicates this as a priority for many and encourages reflective pause on the need to assure the inclusion of time for scholarly pursuits when employers and employees partner in developing productivity cubes.

Conflict of Interest

None.

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None.

Study Approval

The author(s) confirm that any aspect of the work covered in this manuscript that has involved human patients has been conducted with the ethical approval of all relevant bodies.

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