

## Why Researchers from Other Countries Submit Manuscripts to US Journals

In her article "US Medical Journal Editors' Attitudes Toward Submissions from Other Countries", Cheryl Iverson<sup>1</sup> wonders what might be leading non-US researchers to submit their manuscripts with increasing frequency to US journals. There is an important motive that editors who are not familiar with research-evaluation policies in European and Asian countries may not be aware of. I suspect this motive has made a large contribution to the trend that Iverson reports.

In at least two European countries, publicly funded research groups or individual researchers are rewarded in the form of grants (Finland)<sup>2</sup> or salary increases (Spain)<sup>3</sup> directly on the basis of the impact factor (IF) of the journals that publish their research results. If the IF is high enough (according to criteria set by government research-evaluation agencies), they get more money. If it is below the cutoff "score", no grant or salary bonus is forthcoming. The Chinese government and universities also pay national researchers bonuses for publishing in international journals.<sup>4</sup>

This policy may be acting as a powerful inducement for some researchers to seek publication in high-IF journals, most of which are published in the United States. Moreover, imperfections in ISI's data-gathering and indexing procedures work to the disadvantage of journals published in countries where English is not the first language<sup>5,6</sup> and make these journals unattractive to international authors. Even without the economic motivation, and despite many protestations from scientometricians, publishing in high-IF journals is seen as more prestigious than publishing in lower-IF journals.

This practice, while enhancing researchers' available funding, salary, and ego, may actually slow the incorporation of new findings into the knowledge base. In a more general journal with a broader scope, larger subscription base, and higher IF, an article from a nonanglophone country may be ignored by most readers on the assumption that its contents are relevant only to experts from the same country as

the authors. In a more specialized journal or one devoted to a smaller geographic area, the findings are likely to be relevant to (and hence read and used by) a larger proportion of readers.

There is evidence that pressure to publish in a high-IF journal, although it leads to apparent gains in a country's science productivity statistics, may be slowing awareness of new findings by other experts. One study has shown that the increases during the 1980s in the total number of articles published by Spanish researchers in international journals was not paralleled by a proportional increase in the number of times these articles were cited in these journals.<sup>7</sup> This means that, paradoxically, the more articles Spanish researchers publish in international journals, the less impact they have on the international scientific community. The consequences of these publishing and citation patterns for countries whose governments actively encourage their researchers to export their articles to high-IF journals deserve further investigation.

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