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Time-lag from Submission to Printing in Indian Biomedical Journals

The timeliness of publication in five Indian, clinical, biomedical journals (*Indian Pediatrics*, *The Indian Journal of Pediatrics*, *Neurology India*, *The Indian Journal of Medical Research* and *Journal of Postgraduate Medicine*) from January 2007 to December 2008 was compared. The time from manuscript submission to publication for the journals studied (median: 358.3 days; range: 202.9-421.3 days) was not significantly different.

Key words: India, Publication delay, Time lag, Turn-around time.

Research manuscripts face a 12-18 month time-lag from initial submission to final publication in a scientific journal [1,2]. The time lag in publication may adversely impact the careers of younger scientists, in addition to loss of information by hindering timely incorporation of major advances into the policy and practice of medicine.

We selected five Indian, clinical, biomedical journals with the highest Impact Factors (Thompson Scientific) for the year 2008. Print issues of *Indian Pediatrics (IP)*, *The Indian Journal of Pediatrics (IJP)*, *Neurology India (NI)*, *The Indian Journal of Medical Research (IJMR)* and *Journal of Postgraduate Medicine (JPGM)* were hand searched for the two year period from January 2007 to December 2008 to determine the article specific information including the dates of submission, review, acceptance, and publication.

Of the journals studied, *IP*, *IJP* and *IJMR* were monthly, and *NI* and *JPGM* were quarterly publications. We found desired complete information for calculation of various time periods only in *IP* and *JPGM*. *Indian Journal of Medical Research* only provided time from submission to publication, and *NI* provided time from acceptance to publication. Two issues of *IJP* did not provide the relevant dates related to the editorial process. The various time periods are detailed in **Table I**.

Time from submission to review, which is the editor's first response, also called as 'turn-around time', is approximately 3 months (for accepted manuscripts) for both *IP* and *JPGM*. The average time taken after the first review is around 4 months. After acceptance, an additional around 3.5 months are taken for the article to come in printed form. *JPGM* was the journal with the shortest time from submission to print (202.9 days), but this was not significantly different from the other journals.

Many authors have suggested turn around time as a marker of timeliness of a journal's review process [3-4]. This data for accepted manuscripts was available only for *IP* (85 days) and *JPGM* (107 days) and was comparable to previously reported median delay of 2-4 months [3-5]. The use of the Internet makes it possible to massively reduce the duration of time from first submission of a manuscript to its eventual publication [1,2]. The effect of electronic manuscript/email submission on timeliness was studied but no consistent differences in the timeliness of publication were found between journal with or without electronic manuscript submission.

TABLE I TIME TAKEN FOR PUBLICATION OF ORIGINAL PAPERS (2007-2008)

Mean time (d)	<i>Indian Pediatr</i> (n=127)	<i>Indian J Pediatr</i> *(n=146)	<i>Indian J Med Res</i> (n=188)	<i>J Postgrad Med</i> (n=40)	<i>Neurol India</i> (n=60)	All journals
Submission to Review	83.5	-	-	107.6	-	91.6
Review to Acceptance	169.9	-	-	36.7	-	125.5
Submission to Acceptance	253.6	211.1	-	144.3	-	215.6
Acceptance to Publication	130.2	146.4	-	58.6	73.2	107.7
Submission to Publication	383.7	358.3	421.3	202.9	-	350.0

Indian Pediatr: Indian Pediatrics; *Indian J Pediatr*: Indian Journal of Pediatrics; *Indian J Med Res*: Indian Journal of Medical Research; *J Postgrad Med*: Journal of Postgraduate Medicine; *Neurol India*: Neurology India.

The time from review to acceptance is dependant both on the authors (a long time taken to revise the manuscript, not all comments addressed, etc), and the journal office (decision on the revised manuscript, speed of re-review, etc). It has previously also been reported that waiting for authors' responses to editorial feedback is the greatest cause of delay in the editorial processes [6]. The average time (125 days) in this study was much higher than previous reports [7].

The time from acceptance to publication reflects both a delay at the editorial office/publisher level and/or a backlog of large number of accepted articles with the journal [4]. Thus, a more popular journal may have a higher backlog of accepted articles, and consequently a longer time from acceptance to publication [7,8]. This time was the least for *JPGM* followed by *NI*, where many articles got published in the same month in which they were accepted (7.2% and 21.6%, respectively). Journals with e-publication ahead of print facility frequently obviate these delays, but none of the journals studied had this service during the study period.

The time from manuscript submission to publication for the five journals studied is not significantly different, but is much higher than that for many international journals. There is an urgent need to identify and address the factors responsible for this long time-lag.

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