Encouraging letters to the editor in EMHJ

Sir

Being an author in and a reader of peer-reviewed medical journals, I am always interested to express my views freely. Scientific discourse occurs in many forms: among colleagues, at scientific meetings, during peer review and after publication. Such discourse is essential to interpreting studies and guiding future research. Thus the letter section of a scientific journal is an essential part of post-publication peer review [1]. Through the letters section, scientific articles published in a peer-reviewed journal are subject to continuing scrutiny. This section is therefore a forum for scientific discourse and essential in interpreting studies and guiding future research. Moreover, it helps make a journal accountable to the medical community [2].

Because of the aforementioned and my wish to play a role in improving the quality of articles published in the journals of our Region, I made a PubMed search of 5 medical journals on the total number of publications and the proportion which were letters. PubMed is not only a simple search engine for biomedical citations, but also a powerful tool to conduct certain statistical analyses [3]. A search strategy with a one-hour limit (11 December 2005) was performed including the names of the British medical journal, Journal of the American Medical Association, Saudi medical journal, Singapore medical journal and Eastern Mediterranean health journal. The search was limited to the last 5 years (01/01/2000

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to 31/12/2004) to find the total number of publications for each journal and then limited to "Letter" as a type of publication.

The proportion of letters to total number of articles published in the aforementioned journals was 33.74%, 29.76%, 7.73%, 2.93%, 0.56% respectively. The search revealed that during the last 5 years only 3 letters had been published in the *Eastern Mediterranean health journal*. Although I recognize the limitation of comparing different types of journals, this is clearly a small number of letters. It serves as a crude indictor of the importance of encouraging the submission of letters in the *Eastern Mediterranean health journal* in the future.

Journals should welcome letters addressed to the editor [4], especially as they are the only form of discourse that becomes part of the permanent biomedical record, linked with the scientific article through its citation in databases such as MEDLINE [7].

**References**


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