**"BALKAN JOURNAL OF MEDICAL GENETICS"
– FACTS, EDITORIAL POLICIES, PRACTICES
AND CHALLENGES**

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Abstract

The *Balkan Journal of Medical Genetics* (BJMG) is an international, open access journal that publishes scientific papers covering different aspects of medical genetics. It is published by the Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts twice a year in both printed and electronic versions. BJMG is covered by many abstracting and indexing databases, including PubMed Central and Thomson Reuters.

Although there are many journals in the field of medical genetics, only a few come from regions outside Western Europe and North America. Being one of these few journals, BJMG aims to promote genetics and research on this topic in the Balkan countries and beyond. BJMG's main goal is to raise the scientific quality and metrics of the journal and provide a better place for BJMG in the community of scientific journals.

Key words: editorial policies, journal, human genetics, medical, genetics, Balkan, BJMG

Introduction

The *Balkan Journal of Medical Genetics* (BJMG) is an open access, English language journal that publishes scientific papers covering different aspects of medical genetics, including human cytogenetics, molecular genetics, clinical genetics, immunogenetics, oncogenetics, pharmacogenetics, population genetics, genetic screening and diagnosis of monogenic and polygenic diseases, prenatal and preimplantation genetic diagnosis, genetic counselling, and advances in treatment and prevention. It was founded with the main goal of promoting genetics and research on this topic in Balkan countries, but over the years it has grown into an international journal with papers published by authors from different parts of the world (Figure 1).

The founding co-editors of BJMG were Academician Georgi D. Efremov from Macedonia and Prof. Draga Toncheva from Sofia, Bulgaria. BJMG started in 1998 in Sofia, Bulgaria as a journal with four printed issues per year. Since 2001 the journal has been published in Skopje, twice per year, by the Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts and with the support of the scientific and administrative staff of the Georgi D. Efremov Research Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology. The skilful leadership of Prof. Efremov until his last days in 2011 when he passed away, his knowledge, enthusiasm and commitment were invaluable for the international recognition of BJMG.

Figure 1 – Countries of origin of authors who have published in BJMG

Since 2006 when the BJMG web-site was created (www.bjmg.edu.mk), BJMG has both a printed and an electronic version. On the web-site readers can freely read and download articles published in BJMG, making it an open access

journal. In 2011 a contract was signed with the Versita publishing group, later De Gruyter Open [1], which accelerated the inclusion of BJMG in a number of databases, thus increasing its visibility (Figure 2).

Figure 2 – BJMG journal, issue, article page and article full text views in the period 2008–2013

BJMG today is covered by many abstracting and indexing databases: Celdes, Chemical Abstracts Service (CAS), CAS – SciFinder, CNKI Scholar (China National Knowledge Infrastructure), CNPIEC, DOAJ, EBSCO – TOC Premier, EBSCO Discovery Service, Elsevier – BIOBASE/CABS (Current Awareness in Bio-

logical Sciences), Elsevier – EMBASE, Elsevier – SCOPUS, Google Scholar, J-Gate, Naviga (Softweco), Primo Central (ExLibris), ProQuest, PubMed, SCImago (SJR), Summon (Serials Solutions/ProQuest), Thomson Reuters – Journal Citation Reports/Science Edition, Thomson Reuters – Science Citation Index Expan-

ded, Ulrich's Periodicals Directory/ulrichweb, WorldCat (OCLC). The print version of BJMG is distributed to more than 50 institutions and libraries throughout Europe and overseas.

The cover pages are the trademark of the journal (Figure 3). They include photos of anti-

que items and objects related to the history of Balkan countries and populations that are carefully chosen by Academician Vera Bitrakova Grozdanova, who is an expert in archaeology and cultural heritage.

Figure 3 – BJMG cover pages – trademark of the journal

BJMG has an international editorial board consisting of 33 renowned experts in the field of human genetics from all the Balkan countries, but also from different European and overseas countries. The long-lasting and continuous support of Prof. Frank Vella from Saskatoon Canada as an Editorial Board member has been an invaluable contribution to BJMG.

Editorial policies and practices

BJMG accepts only papers that are original work, no part of which has been published or is being considered for publication elsewhere except as brief abstracts. Manuscripts may be submitted as original articles, review papers, essays, case reports, short communications and letters to the editor. Occasionally, Proceedings from conferences and scientific meetings are published as a special Supplements of the Journal.

Given BJMG is published only twice per year, it has a low number of submissions. However, the number of submitted papers is constantly growing. This is influencing the rejection rate, which reached 47.2% in 2013. In addition, more than half the authors who receive "major comments" from the reviewers do not send a revised version of their manuscript. Thus,

only 33% of the manuscripts submitted to BJMG are actually published.

Although electronic submission is available, it is somewhat out-dated and is not functioning very well. Thus, most of the manuscripts are submitted by e-mail.

BJMG aims to provide the authors with fair and constructive reviews. Every manuscript is treated as privileged information and is reviewed by at least two reviewers. The primary criteria for judging the acceptability of a manuscript are scientific importance, novelty and the technical soundness of the experimental work.

The peer-review process, as one of the most important elements of scientific publishing, has been one of the major challenges for the BJMG office. At first the reviewers of BJMG manuscripts were mainly the members of the Editorial Board. However, considering the broad and diverse fields that BJMG covers, there was a need to broaden the population of reviewers. Currently, the reviewers for BJMG manuscripts are selected from the Editorial Board members, from a database of previous reviewers, from references listed in the manuscript, from PubMed database by searching for authors who are very close to the topic/methodology presented in the

manuscripts and from the list of reviewers suggested by the authors. Still, more than half of the invited reviewers do not respond, which leads to a substantial delay in the handling of submitted manuscripts. Further delay is caused by the slow response of the authors, especially when the decision is 'major revision'. To expedite resubmission to a more appropriate journal, manuscripts that are inconsistent with Editorial Guidelines are declined by the Editors, without an external review.

The editing of all articles is independent whether they are written by authors from English or non-English speaking regions. Given that the majority of the authors submitting papers to BJMG are from non-English speaking countries, the role of Mrs. Marianne Carver who has been editing and proofreading the manuscripts published in BJMG since the foundation of the journal is enormous.

To ensure the originality of the content published in BJMG, in 2014 the journal became a member of the growing community of CrossCheck System's users [2]. This system allows deep screening of the manuscripts, with the main aim of eliminating plagiarism and providing a high standard and quality peer-review process.

For years all financial costs related to the publishing of the papers in BJMG have been borne by MASA and "Georgi D. Efremov" RCGEB. Unfortunately, the financial costs for the journal have been increasing over the years and starting from 2015 there will be a fee for all articles that will be published in BJMG.

Journal Scientific Metrics

The journal impact factor is a measurement of visibility of articles in specific journals. It is defined as the ratio of the number of citations in a given year to the 'citable' articles published in the previous two years. Information comes from the approximately 11,000 journals indexed by the Web of Science, which is published in the Journal Citation Report (JCR) [3]. The impact factor of BJMG has been reported by Thomson Reuters from 2009 when it was 0,075. The BJMG impact factor for the year 2013 was 0.167.

The SCImago Journal & Country Rank (SCImagoJR) is a portal that includes the journals and country scientific indicators developed from the information contained in the Scopus

database (Elsevier B.V.) [4]. The SJR expresses the average number of weighted citations received in the selected year by the documents published in the journal in the three previous years. The h index expresses the journal's number of articles (*h*) that have received at least *h* citations. It quantifies both journal scientific productivity and scientific impact. According to SCImago Journal Rank indicator (SJR) [4], BJMG ranks in position 89 and according to H-index it was in position 82 out of 95 journals in the area of medical genetics in the year 2013. However, 85 of the 95 journals come from Western Europe or Northern America. There are only two journals from Eastern Europe; one is BJMG with SJR of 0,117 and H-index of 5 and the second is *Cytology and Genetics* from Ukraine, with SJR of 0,146 and H-index of 9. The BJMG metrics are also close to the four journals from the Asiatic region (*Indian Journal of Human Genetics*, *Chinese Journal of Medical Genetics*, *International Journal of Human Genetics* and *Journal of Prenatal Diagnosis and Therapy*), one from the Middle East (*Iranian Journal of Cancer Prevention*) and one from Latin America (*Journal of Basic and Applied Genetics*) with SJR indices ranging from 0.101 to 0.212 and H-indices ranging between 1 and 12.

Conclusion

Although there is high competition in the field of medical genetics, we strongly believe that there is a place for BJMG in the community of genetics journals. Our aims in the future will be focused towards better interaction with authors and readers, improvement of the peer-review process by attracting young motivated reviewers, and automation of the submission and manuscript handling system, with the ultimate goal of raising the scientific quality and metrics of the journal and providing a better place for BJMG in the community of scientific journals.

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