Saudi Medical Journal
A college by itself!

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Saudi medical journal was founded in 1979. In 1999 it became monthly with a steady growth in manuscripts submitted and number of pages published. In the last 5 years, we have doubled in number of articles and pages published. In addition we achieved growth not only in quantity but also in quality. We have published many supplements and special issues in Arabic and English. In the year 2000, the journal was indexed by the National Library of Medicine in Medline and Pubmed. We also have established a website (www.smj.org.sa) with an average of 1000 hits daily. We recollected all the published data from all journals published in Saudi Arabia from 1979 until the end of 1999, in a special CD, MedBase.

**Annual Report.** This year we received 587 manuscripts with an increase of 42% from last year and overall increase of 124% in the last 5 years from 1998. The rejection rate for this year was 56% compared to 38% last year, and 30% in 1998 (Figure 1). We published 1572 pages with a 36% increase from last year and a 91% increase from 1998 (Figure 2). The turnover time from submission to acceptance for this year was 3.3 months, the same as last year, but lower by 35% than it was in 1998 at 5.1 months. Each yearly volume will be split into 2 sub-volumes with 2 binders for each annual volume. With each bound issue we will also include a CD containing all literature published for that period. The original articles still constitute the main subject of each issue (Figure 3). Our articles are still mainly from the Kingdom, but we are receiving more articles from the Arab world and other regional countries, such as, Turkey, Iran, India and Pakistan (Figure 4). Despite the increase in the number of publications we will still run monthly this year, however, in the future we may increase publication to twice monthly. We also started to include related abstracts for some articles, from the Saudi MedBase (Figure 5), this will continue over the coming years.

This year the reader will notice a major change in the Editorial Board, and we would like to thank the members of the Editorial Board who have retired at the end of 2002: Abdul-Aziz Al-Meshari, Fahad Al-Muhanna, Fahad Al-Rabiah, Zain Al-Shareef, Bahaa AbaAlkhail, Menwar Anazi, George Araj (Lebanon), Talal Bakhsh, Hassan Bassiouny (Egypt), Abdulbari Bener (UAE), Joseph Dagher (USA), Dirk Deleu (Oman), Mohsen El-Hazmi, Hatem El-Shanti (Jordan), Syed Haider (India), Khalid Haque (UK), Ali Ibrahim (Syria), and Tariq Noman (Yemen). Hussein Al-Freihi, Yagob Al-Mazrou, Nayef Al-Rodhan, Mohammed Abomelha, and Ahmed Kurdi retired from the Editorial Board and joined the Advisory Board. We would also like to thank Muhammad Al-Mufti, Mansour Al-Nozha and Khalid Tabbara who retired from the Advisory Board. We were deeply shocked and saddened by the departure of one of our eminent Advisory Board members, Professor...
George W. Bruyn, one of the founding pillars of the journal. We have invited an excellent faculty to join us in the Editorial Board in addition to those who remain and we hope that this new blood will maintain the progress of the journal. We would especially like to welcome and thank them for accepting our invitation to join our Editorial Board. The new faculty are: Hisham Akbar, Saeed Al-Ghamdi, Maher Al-Hadidi (Jordan), Hindi Al-Hindi, Abrulrahman Al-Rajhi, Assia Al-Rawaf, Ammar Al-Rikabi (Qatar), Ali Al-Shehri, Shoukri Bazbarashi, Ahmed Elzubier, Mohammed Fouda, Issam Hamadah, Ali Hajeer, Khalid Kalantan, Muhammad Majeed-Saidan, Ratib Mesleh, Adnan Mofiti, Sadek Pharaon (Syria), Khalid Qattan, Assem Rostom (UK), Mona Shahed and Ghazi Tadmouri (Turkey). Also, Ashry Gad Mohammed (supervising statistics), and Rabie Abdel-Halim (editing History of Medicine) will be added to our Editorial Board. There will be some changes in the Editorial Office where Susan Douglas, in addition to her post as the Copy Editor will be Assistant Editor of the journal and Joyce Figuerres, in addition to her post as Editorial Manager, will supervise the Journal website.

In the year 2002 we appointed Susan Douglas as Quality Control Officer to ensure the excellence of the journal and to handle all the complaints arising between the journal, the authors, the reviewers and the publisher. This was very productive and in the coming years this will not be confined to the Quality Control Officer, but we will appoint an Ombudsmen. The first detailed Quality Control report is published in this issue and will be sent to members of the Editorial and Advisory Board for their comments.

The Future. Although the journal is now a competitive indexed journal, we are still committed to our ambitious plan for this year and the many years to follow. Our plans for the coming year are outlined.

Content. This year we will concentrate on the quality in addition to the look and the size of the journal. Due to a steady increase in number of publications, we suspect that the rejection rate will be increased. Although this is sometimes painful, we believe it is necessary.

The reader will notice some changes in the layout of the journal, and the highlights section is now an established part of each issue. There will be changes in the tables and figures, for the better. Errata notices will appear in the website and be sent to the National Library of Medicine to be linked to all the manuscripts on Pubmed. We have omitted Letters to the Editor and replaced them by Brief Communications. The size of the Journal will be enlarged in width but not in length. Lastly, Instructions to the Authors will now be available in our web site and not published in each issue, but will appear once at the end of each sub-volume.

Website. Our website has been modified to accommodate an extensive search facility. We plan to expand on electronic communication through our website, and we may consider sending articles for review electronically through the website, once we ensure confidentially with a protected password for each manuscript. Our website is still in the developing stages, but still attracts 30,000 hits per month. The highest hits were from Saudi Arabia & North America followed by Europe, Arab countries and Japan (Figure 6). We hope to make many more improvements for the benefit of the readers and reviewers. Any suggestions or comments regarding our webpage, should be
sent directly to Joyce Figuerres, through e-mail via the webpage.

**Supplements.** The journal has published a number of special issues in the past in the Arabic language. This year we will have a new endeavour in which we will publish a well designed issue in Arabic called “Health and Life” which is addressed not only to physicians but also to the public. It will be edited by our Arabic Editor, Ghada Al-Ahmed. It will deal with many topics important to the society addressed by prominent clinicians and scientists giving real facts on topics to educate the public by evidence based rather than tabloid medicine. This endeavour was well supported by His Royal Highness Prince Sultan bin Abdul-Aziz, our Patron, and Ketab Al-Otaibi, our Editorial Director. In addition to this we are planning to have 2 supplements, one on Pediatric Surgery with Assia Al-Rawaf as the Guest Editor and the second on Cancer in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with Shouki Bazarbashi as the Guest Editor, both have joined our Editorial Board. Additional supplements on important courses, workshops and symposia are also planned for the coming years. We are willing to publish more supplements on important academic activities in the Kingdom or outside. We have appointed Susan Douglas, to be Assistant to the Guest Editors for any future supplements.

**Courses, workshops and symposia.** At the beginning of this year, SMJ entered into an exciting venture: The Second Intensive Course on (1) Planning and Performing a Research Study and (2) Writing and Presenting a Scientific Paper in conjunction with the Research Committee of the Department of Surgery at King Saud University. A report on this symposium will be published in one of the coming issues. We have approached the East Mediterranean Medical Journal and the Bahrain Medical Bulletin with a view to holding a combined meeting on Medical Journalism, which has resulted in a Regional Conference to be held in Cairo 24-27 November this year. The objectives of this conference will be to review the current status of medical journals published in the Region. This will include assessing the problems, developing guidelines and establishing a code of ethics. A one day training workshop for editors will be conducted. As a result of the meeting we hope to establish a combined Council of Editors of medical journals in the Region. Editors, interested health educators, biomedical researchers, authors, publishers, scientists and academicians are asked to participate.

The journal has gone so far, not only as a basin for publication of manuscripts on medical research, but also in society education by publishing arabic issues. Our future vision is to be part of training and education, and set a foundation for a college in medical journalism not only in the Kingdom but in our area. Our future plans are very ambitious but we cannot do it alone without the help of the Colleges, Universities, researchers and subscribers.

At a time where “civilized” countries are busy with war and terrorism in our area, Saudi Medical Journal shines monthly as a civilized face coming from Arabia.
QUALITY CONTROL REPORT 2002

Saudi Medical Journal

The objective of Saudi Medical Journal is to publish high quality manuscripts. In the year 2002 we established a Quality Control Section and a member of staff was appointed to be the Quality Control Officer (QCO) and act as an Ombudsman for the Journal. The QCO will act as a spokesperson for authors and liaise with authors and editors. The QCO will deal with grievances referred from authors, readers, editors and any members of the editorial staff. The QCO’s duties will be to supervise the speed and proficiency of manuscript (ms) processing, to ensure the quality of published ms and to investigate any errors of publications and to deal with complaints on irregularities concerning published ms.

The QCO monitored all complaints received from 5 key areas: 1. Editing; 2. Processing; 3. Post journal publication; 4. Readers and, 5. Marketing. The QCO also looked carefully at how the editor or the editorial office dealt with, and responded to all the complaints. In addition, the QCO was involved in policy changes resulting from the complaints.

Editing. Authors. The complaints from authors regarding editing are summarized.

1. A letter was received from an author complaining about a change of title of the ms after having been proofread. The title of the ms had been edited and changed prior to publication, and the author felt that this changed the meaning of the ms. Action: (i) Although the Journal did not entirely agree with the author in this case, an erratum notice was subsequently published regarding this matter. (ii) It was decided that no change of title should occur at any stage of editing except by approval of the author, if disagreement continues the Editor makes the final decision, however the right of the author is protected by withdrawing the ms.

2. A letter was received from an author referring to an article before publication, it was regarding references made to the Holy Quran. A misunderstanding arose between the author and the desktop publisher over some translation from the Holy Quran to English. Action: This matter was satisfactorily resolved through continuous communications with the author by the editor.

3. A ms was accepted with 2 authors. On publication of the ms, the corresponding author (the 2nd author) was listed as the first author. The original first author submitted a complaint. Action: (i) The editor contacted the author by telephone and sent a strong apology letter to the first author, and an erratum was published. (ii) The editing checklist was updated to state that the corresponding author is not always the first author.

4. A letter was received from the authors requesting withdrawal of his ms after it had been accepted and the Assignment of Copyright had been signed. Action: This request was discussed and deliberated at length by the editorial office and the decision was to grant withdrawal although the policy of the Journal is that upon acceptance of an article and submission of the completed Assignment of Copyright, the ms becomes the property of the Journal. The authors were informed that this may affect future publications, especially if all, or part of the article subsequently appeared in another journal.

5. A letter was received from authors of an accepted ms requesting alteration of the order of author's names and omission of one author. Action: (i) Initially, a letter was sent from the Editorial Office denying this request as it is the Journal policy that once a ms is accepted no addition, omission or changing of the order of authors is permitted. (ii) The editorial office requested a letter from the omitted author stating that he approved the change, there are no ongoing conflicts between himself and the other authors, and a clear explanation of why he wishes to be omitted. A new Assignment of Copyright with all authors' signature was requested. Final action: All the authors complied with the demands of the journal, and it was accepted, after making clear to the omitted author that none of this ms should be published without the written permission of Saudi Medical Journal.

6. A letter was received from an author complaining of the changes made to the figures and layout of his article which, resulted in a difference in the sequence of

Prepared by Susan Douglas, Quality Control Officer.
references, the same figure being published twice within the article, one figure being omitted, and another figure being only partially published. The author asked for republication of his ms. **Action:** An evidence-based letter was sent to the author indicating that (i) there is no need to republish the article as any ms is subject to editorial changes up to the time of publication; (ii) there is no need for an erratum notice regarding the references, because they correspond to the appropriate text although they are different in sequence; (iii) an erratum notice will be issued regarding the correction of the figures. (iv) The policy regarding sequencing of references was amended to indicate that when references are mentioned only in tables but not in the text, the first reference number used in the table should follow on numerically from the last reference number in the main text of the article.

7. The Editor referred one published article to the QCO because he noticed an additional name on publication. **Action:** (i) A full investigation was undertaken and it was found that this was added after proofreading and was entirely an editorial mistake by the Copy Editor and was overlooked at blueprint. “The Editor immediately wrote to the first author of the ms, and simultaneously to the additional author. Due to the seriousness of this error, 3 consecutive errata notices will be published. (ii) This was corrected abruptly in the website and the electronic publication in Pubmed.

8. A complaint letter was received from an author stating that his name was omitted in the Arabic abstract, although it was included in the article published in English. **Action:** This occurred during arabic editing and was overlooked by the Arabic Editor. A letter of apology was promptly sent to the author indicating that an erratum notice will be published in Arabic in an upcoming issue.

**Editing Staff.** 1. The copy editor noted that an author made major changes to the text of the ms at the proofreading stage. **Action:** As the policy of the journal is that once a ms has reached the proofreading stage, the author may only make minor corrections to his ms in the context of spelling, and to answer any specific queries or correct any editing errors, the ms was returned to the Processing Department and the author was asked to resubmit the revised ms for reconsideration and review. The ms was eventually accepted after correction, but this resulted in a 4-month delay in publication of the ms. 2. The copy editing section noted a few ms were submitted without mentioning where the study was carried out. These were returned to the author for clarification and in one instance, the author asked to withdraw the ms. **Action:** The Institute and Department of where the study was carried out have been added to the processing and editing checklist and the Instructions to Authors. 3. Proofing. There is considerable delay in receiving the proofed ms resulting in delay of publication. This is not always due to authors delinquency but also due to wrong address, telephone number or e-mail, especially from countries with poor communication systems. **Action:** It was decided that in these countries the author should respond to the acknowledgment letter confirming that the communication method (i.e. fax or e-mail) is correct and working before processing a ms.

**Processing. 1. Plagiarism.** The Editorial Assistant noted during ms processing, a single author submitted a ms that was very similar in content to a previously accepted multi authored ms from the same institute. **Action:** The ms has been returned to the author indicating the possibility of plagiarism in this case and stating that the journal has the right to take further action in the future.

2. **Rejected manuscripts.** An author requested reconsideration of his rejected ms. **Action:** The editor's reply was that once the ms is rejected we do not renegotiate, not because they do not merit publication, but because there are many journals to which a ms may be submitted. The author accepted the editor's comments, and the ms was not published.

3. **Secondary publication.** On 3 occasions the reviewer, or the editor discovered ms submitted where the text was fully or partly published in other journals, without referring to the published material in the reference section. **Action:** A letter from the Editor was sent asking the author for an explanation, also indicating that this is a non acceptable practice which may lead to further action, not only by the journal, but also by the journals in which the ms was initially published.

4. We received 2 letters complaining about noncommunication, where the wrong letter or e-mail went to the wrong recipient. **Action:** Expedited apology and correction was carried out by the Editorial Manager. All parties were satisfied.

**Post publication errors.** The editorial staff conducted a regular monthly meeting to review the published journal which, resulted in 21 errata. Most of these were due to mistakes in tables and figures or missing data. A few errors were also noted in the Arabic abstracts, which did not merit an erratum, except once in which the author’s name was mistakenly omitted.

**Readers complaints.** We received a letter of complaint from the Head of a Department regarding a previous junior member of his staff publishing Brief Communication or Correspondence stating that he is still a member of that department. **Action:** It was decided for that any future publication where the author(s) are all junior staff members, a senior staff member should be acknowledged or head of department who should submit a written endorsement of the ms.

**Marketing.** 1. There was one letter received from an author complaining that he did not receive any offprints. **Action:** After referral to the Marketing Department, it was found that the author did order offprints, but he did...
not submit any payment by mail or credit card, so his order was not processed. The author then requested to send payment and receive offprints of his article. We indicated that after the journal is published it would be very difficult to order back-dated offprints, so unfortunately, his request could not be fulfilled.

2. **Subscription.** Complaints from different subscribers who have been receiving more than one copy of the journal. **Action:** This occurred because the spellings of names, especially Arabic names, have more than one version, or because some of the subscribers had left their post without informing the journal. This lead to an update of the subscribers’ database, resulting in a 10-15% cut in the total number of subscribers.

In addition to the complaints and the queries, the QCO received many letters of commendation and praise for the journal. We would like to present one comment from Dr. Suhad M. Bahiri, Associate Prof. Of Clinical Biochemistry, King Abdul-Aziz University Hospital, Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

"the journal provides us in the Kingdom with a window to reach the scientific world outside. In fact, I have received inquiries and paper requests from various parts of the world ranging from Japan to Argentina after my abstracts were seen on Medline. Keep up the good work"

We conclude that the Quality Control Section in its first year prompted the implementation of several new policy changes, which will continue to improve the excellence of the Saudi Medical Journal.
The Editors would like to thank all the reviewers who have participated in the excellent review of manuscripts and books for the year 2002.

* Reviewers who reviewed 3 or more articles for the year 2002