Medical journals will continue as a main vehicle of scientific information for years to come, particularly where access to more efficient instruments is relatively limited. The quality of medical journals depends on several factors involving 3 groups of people; namely: the authors, the reviewers and the editors. The Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal (EMHJ) formulated its essential requirements for the manuscripts submitted for possible publication. These are published in every issue of the Journal, and potential authors are strongly advised to adhere to them, to avoid first-hand rejection of their progress. The reviewers’ role is a keystone in maintaining the quality of a medical journal. A reviewer is required to address several important aspects of the paper under review and to resend his opinion thereon with his recommendation concerning the acceptability of the paper or otherwise. The editorial management is a crucial part of the publishing process. The editors begin action with the receipt of the manuscript, direct the various steps of evaluation, correction and re-submission, until an editorial decision is taken to accept the paper as is, accept it after modification or rejection. Editors will then make necessary text and layout editing. Due consideration is given to the statistical, multilingual and ethical aspects as well as to the overall uniformity of the terminology, nomenclatures and style throughout the volume as a whole. In February 1999, the EMHJ was accepted by the National Library of Medicine, USA, to be indexed and included in Index Medicus and MEDLINE. Such selection usually depends on several critical criteria; namely: scope and coverage, quality of content, quality of editorial work, production quality, audience and types of content. Evidently, the EMHJ has satisfactorily met all the above criteria.

**ABSTRACT**

Medical journals will continue as a main vehicle of scientific information for years to come, particularly in our part of the world, where access is relatively limited to more efficient instruments of scientific dissemination. It is therefore imperative to ensure the best possible quality to the available medical journals, if they are to fulfill their intended function of dissemination of recent and accurate medical information. The quality of a medical journal is dependent on a wide range of criteria and factors involving 3 main groups of concerned people, namely: the authors, the reviewers and the editors. Each of the categories has specific responsibilities that should be met to contribute to the quality of the journal concerned. It must be mentioned, however, that such responsibilities are not static, they could be changed according to the nature and requirements of each journal. **Authors’ responsibilities.** In his introductory foreword for the first issue of the Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal (EMHJ), Dr. Gezairy, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, indicated that among the effective instruments for exchanging information is a reliable journal providing authoritative and up-to-date works on new developments, burning problems, successful solutions and prevailing trends in the public health fields. With this in mind, potential authors of the EMHJ are requested to meet a number of specific requirements to ensure receivability for their works. The main requirements are as follows:

- Papers submitted for publication must not have been
published or accepted for publication elsewhere. The subject of the paper should pertain to public health or some other related technical and scientific subject within the field of interest of the World Health Organization, with special reference to the Eastern Mediterranean Region. The number of authors should not exceed 5. All authors should have made material contribution to either, the design, analysis or writing of the study, and have approved the final version submitted. Authors may be asked to verify their contribution. Papers reporting original research findings should follow the IMRAD format: Introduction, Materials/Subjects and Methods, Results, Analysis and Discussion. An abstract of no more than 100 words should be supplied clearly and briefly stating the objectives, context, results and conclusions. Authors should verify where appropriate that all persons on whom research has been carried out have given their informed consent, and where participants (living or dead) could not give such consent, surrogate consent was obtained. Review articles should contain sections dealing with objectives, sources, and methods of selection, compilation and interpretation of data and conclusions. In-text citations of published work should be limited to essential up-to-date references. Except for review articles, a maximum of 25 references is advisable. To avoid layout problems in final production, not more than one table or figure per 1000 words is preferred. Figures derived from data must be accompanied by those data to enable redrawing if necessary. These are some excerpts from the Guidelines for Authors, which are published at the end of each issue of the EMHJ. The editorial managers of the journal adhere to such guidelines to ensure uniformity of manuscript presentations. Many papers are returned to the authors before any action is taken, just because the material submitted was not in line with the authors’ guidelines.

**Reviewers’ role.** It goes without saying that a qualified, fair-minded reviewer, represents a keystone in maintaining the quality of a medical journal. Reviewers for EMHJ contributions are mainly derived from university professors. For volume 6 (2000) of the EMHJ, 201 medical professors evaluated manuscripts submitted for possible publication, while 94 other experts contributed reviews for contributions under consideration. Reviewers are carefully selected for their personal merits and experience in the subject areas concerned. Every reviewer is supplied with an anonymous copy of the manuscript concerned, with the related tables and figures, and a list of important points which he should bear in mind in his evaluation. These points are formulated into a series of questions to be answered by the reviewer, namely: Title: Is the title concise, does it conform with the objectives and results of the study? Introduction: Are the study’s objectives clearly identified and adequately justified? Study design: Are the design and the methods described well? How appropriate were they? Materials and methods: Is sufficient information given to understand how the study was carried out? To repeat it? Statistical analysis: Were the appropriate tests used? Are the results reported clearly? Results: Are the results pertinent to the stated objectives? Is sufficient information presented? Unnecessary detail? Discussion and conclusion: Are the results of the study correctly interpreted? Are the conclusions justified? Literature review: Is it complete and up-to-date? Are sufficient references given? Are any essential references lacking? Suitability of the article and priority of the subject matter for the EMHJ: Is the information it provides new, already known or of no interest? Reviewers are usually asked to indicate their general judgment of the article and to give their recommendation to publish the paper just as it is (which rarely happens), to publish it with modifications (conditional acceptance) or to be rejected for the reasons given in the comments. In cases of conditional acceptance or rejection, the reviewers’ remarks are sent to the author, after masking the reviewers’ identities, for information or appropriate action. Papers submitted for consideration are usually evaluated by 2 peer reviewers after blinding the authors’ identities. It is felt that such an approach helps the process to proceed smoothly and fairly. However, a randomized trial published in the Journal of the American Medical Association in July 1998, concluded that blinding and unmasking made no editorially significant difference to review quality, reviewers’ recommendations, or time taken to review.4

**Statistical revision.** In addition to the reviewers’ opinions on the statistical aspects of the papers under consideration, all candidate papers are submitted to one expert statistician to review the statistical data throughout the whole volume, ensuring that the data in the text, tables and graphs are uniformly presented and internally consistent. Confirming that the right statistical tests were applied, the correct results were obtained and the proper interpretations were made represents another keystone in the quality level, not only of individual pieces of work, but also of the whole volume of the Journal.

**Trilingual content.** Arabic, English and French, the 3 working languages of the Regional Office, are used to produce the EMHJ. For every research article, the title and a brief abstract are published in the 3 languages. In every issue of the Journal, the mainstream is in English, but one or 2 articles are published in Arabic, French or both. This approach is considered as a means for publishing standard medical terminology in the 3 languages in the same place, as well as providing a practical exercise in scientific translation between the 3 languages.

**Editorial management.** This is a crucial part of the publishing process. It starts at the very beginning and ends with the publication of an issue. The editor receives contributions at the outset. He may return to the author concerned any paper that does not conform
to the editorial requirements stipulated in the Authors’ Guidelines. Otherwise, receipt of the paper is acknowledged and the paper is forwarded to 2 selected reviewers for evaluation during a period of 6–8 weeks depending on the subject and size of the paper. The reviewers’ comments are then studied by the editor who takes one of 3 editorial decisions accordingly: acceptance, conditional acceptance or rejection. The decision is then conveyed to the author, and if re-submission is required a period of 2 months is fixed for this purpose. If the revised paper is not received by the target date, the author is then reminded and the time allowed is extended by 2 more months after which the matter is considered closed if the revised text is not received. The revised text is checked by the editors to make sure that the review remarks were applied satisfactorily and that the statistical requirements were effected. The text is then accepted for publication, if no more remarks were made. The editors then make editorial revisions as deemed necessary, including abridgment of the text and omission of tabular or graphic material as appropriate. All efforts are made during the final setting of the volume to ensure uniformity in tabular and graphic presentations as well as homogeneity of terminology, nomenclatures and style, throughout the whole volume.

**News, meeting and bibliography.** In the EMHJ, it was found appropriate to provide the readers with some light reading in addition to the scientific content of the Journal. This takes the form of recent health news; information on recently held meetings on health topics in the Region and a bibliography of recent publications issued on the main topic in each volume of the Journal. It is felt that such additional material adds to the quality and readability of the EMHJ.

**Publishing ethics.** This is an important aspect in the publishing process: aside from the medical research ethics that must be kept in mind throughout the research work and reported within the research paper, the publishing process also has its own ethics that should be followed if a Journal is to maintain its integrity and quality. Many examples can be cited in this regard: An author who makes one piece of research work, but writes thereon several papers addressing different aspects or inputs, referring to the same research population, time and place. An author who submits a manuscript based on an earlier published paper undersigned by him or by others. An author who quotes whole sections from other sources without making due acknowledgement to the original reference. A reviewer who feels free to use the information given in a particular paper for other purposes without seeking permission from the author. A reviewer who attacks the author(s) or vice versa, using critical language, which is inappropriate for scientific exchange. A reviewer or editor who breaks the confidentiality of a research or field study in favor of a third party. These are just a few examples of publishing ethical problems that need consideration and control.

**Journal selection for Index Medicus/MEDLINE.** In February 1999, the EMHJ’s Editor-in-Chief was informed by the National Library of Medicine, Bethesda, United States that the EMHJ had been selected to be indexed and included in Index Medicus and MEDLINE which are available in the US and throughout the world. It might be appropriate to summarize here the critical elements, upon which a medical journal is selected for this prestigious coverage, which is itself is a sign of the high level of excellence reached by the selected journal. Scope and coverage: Index Medicus and MEDLINE provide access to the biomedical literature. The journals under review contain articles predominantly on core biomedical subjects. Quality of content: The scientific merit of a journal’s content is the primary consideration in selecting journals for indexing. The key factors to be considered in recommending a title for indexing are the validity, importance, originality and contribution to the coverage of the field of the overall contents of each title. Quality of editorial work: The journal should demonstrate features that contribute to the objectivity, credibility and quality of the contents. These features may include information about the methods of selecting articles, especially on the explicit process of external peer review, timely correction of errata, explicit responsible retractions when appropriate and opportunity for comments and dissenting opinions. Sponsorship by national or international professional societies may be considered. Production quality: The quality of the layout, printing, graphics and illustrations are all considered in assessing a journal. Audience: MEDLINE and Index Medicus are intended primarily for all those in the health professions. The phrase "health professionals" includes physicians, nurses, dentists, veterinarians and the many types of allied health professionals in the research and health care delivery systems.

Evidently, EMHJ has satisfactorily met all the above criteria, thus deserving to be considered among international quality journals.

**References**


