

Don't be misled by citation figures! (8)

Names are nothing but words

It's not exactly breaking news for the conscientious researcher that reviews are more frequently cited on average than original research articles. Accordingly, it is simple logic that pure review journals usually achieve higher impact factors (IF) when compared to journals mainly publishing original work.

Let's take, for example, *Pharmacological Reviews*. Not so long ago its IF had been a consistent 15, year after year, whereas the "highest" pharmacological journal for original research papers, *Molecular Pharmacology*, reached an IF of 5, at best.

As said, this was nothing unusual. However, then came the big surprise. Suddenly, from one year to the next, the IF for *Pharmacological Reviews* jumped to a completely unexpected 25. What on earth had happened?

Fortunately, these days, tools are readily available to analyse such sudden inconsistencies in more detail. In this instance, it basically meant going into citation databases and looking up the numbers for every single issue of *Pharmacological Reviews*. "January" showed business as usual, the individual review articles had

been cited between five and thirty times during the ensuing two years; more or less the same picture in February, March, April, May, ... Aha, look, "June" was the culprit. Several articles had been cited more than a hundred times. But why?

The titles of the articles finally were somewhat of a give away. The International Union of Pharmacology (IUPHAR) had exclusively claimed this issue of *Pharmacological Reviews* to publish the results of a conference which had been held to establish an obligatory nomenclature for certain receptor families. "Classification of Cannabinoid Receptors" was, for example, the title of one article, "Update on Chemokine Receptor Nomenclature" was another. As we all know, the community immediately and broadly adopted these new standards for subsequent publications.

The Editor-in-Chief of *Pharmacological Reviews* rejoiced at this coup. He didn't mince matters when he afterwards wrote, "It is important to note that *Pharmacological Reviews*, in the most recent evaluation, had an impact factor of 25, the highest of all pharmacology publications. It is also noteworthy that the official IUPHAR nomenclature reports are among the most highly cited articles and contribute to the high impact of the journal."

This little story quite nicely demonstrates that the Science Citation Index database isn't able to do much more than differentiate between letters, comments, original and review articles - provided you select the correct filters.

Also to those aiming for the highest possible citation numbers with minimal effort, accept the following "advice": Join the official international association of your respective discipline and try to become a member of any Committee for Nomenclature and Classification. Particularly in the medical world things constantly have to be named and re-named, classified and re-classified. And you can be sure that the next review is just around the corner...

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