

Korean Association of Medical Journal Editors at the forefront of improving the quality and indexing chances of its member journals

Chang-Ok Suh

President, Korean Association of Medical Journal Editors; Department of Radiation Oncology, Yonsei University College of Medicine, Seoul, Korea

Se Jeong Oh

Chair, Planning and Journal Evaluation Committee, Korean Association of Medical Journal Editors; Department of Surgery, Incheon St. Mary Hospital, The Catholic University of Korea, Incheon, Korea

Sung-Tae Hong

*Vice President, Korean Association of Medical Journal Editors; Editor in Chief, Journal of Korean Medical Science; Department of Parasitology and Tropical Medicine, Seoul National University College of Medicine, Seoul, 110-799, Korea
hst@snu.ac.kr*

Abstract The article overviews some achievements and problems of Korean medical journals published in the highly competitive journal environment. Activities of the Korean Association of Medical Journal Editors (KAMJE) are viewed as instrumental for improving the quality of Korean articles, indexing a large number of local journals in prestigious bibliographic databases and launching new abstract and citation tracking databases or platforms (eg KoreaMed, KoreaMed Synapse, the Western Pacific Regional Index Medicus [WPRIM]). KAMJE encourages its member journals to upgrade science editing standards and to legitimately increase citation rates, primarily by publishing more great articles with global influence. Experience gained by KAMJE and problems faced by Korean editors may have global implications.

Keywords Periodicals as topic; medicine; learned associations; journal indexing; science communication; Korea.

Medicine is one of the major scholarly fields all over the world. Its scientific scope covers a wide range of topics from basic and clinical research, and partly from humanities and social sciences. Over the past two decades, Korean medicine has greatly expanded its scope, advanced basic and clinical research, accumulated cutting-edge information on clinical practice and moved towards highly specialised medical technologies. Along with that, numerous Korean learned societies and related scholarly journals have been launched.

Korean Association of Medical Journal Editors

To meet the growing need of coordinating journal publishing and advancing science writing and editing skills, in February 1996 it was decided to launch the Korean Association of Medical Journal Editors (KAMJE). Initially 51 medical journals and 7 individual members participated in the foundation meeting of KAMJE. At that time there were 224 Korean medical journals, with only five indexed on PubMed/Medline and none on Web of Science. Most journals were oriented towards the local readership. However, some scientists began to publish articles in international prestigious journals and the Korean government officially decided to encourage the international publication during the same period.

Currently there are 213 journals – regular members of

KAMJE.¹ The journals are mostly published by professional societies. KAMJE is now responsible for editors' training on writing, editing, scientific integrity and ethics. The Association also runs three databases, namely KoreaMed, KoreaMed Synapse and Korean Medical Citation Index (KoMCI), tracking member journals.

KoreaMed

The main aim of KAMJE is to improve the quality of local medical publications and to educate Korean editors, similar to that of many related learned associations.² It also aims to improve the visibility of Korean articles. Accordingly, one of the initial activities of KAMJE was to survey the status of local medical journals, to evaluate their quality and to arrange training in science writing and peer review. Subsequently, an important decision was made to establish an English-abstract database covering local medical journals - KoreaMed.

KoreaMed was launched in September 2001 in its present form with about 20,000 English abstracts from Medline.³ The number of abstracts has grown considerably to 184,731, accompanied by figures and tables from 187 journals as of April 2012. The current scope of KoreaMed abstracts ranges from medical sciences to dentistry, nursing, eubiotics, veterinary science and dietetics.

The functionality of KoreaMed is similar to PubMed, a database of abstracts, figures and tables operated by the US National Center for Biotechnology Information.

The journals listed in KoreaMed are reviewed and selected by a review committee in accordance with the KAMJE policies. Indexing in KoreaMed is subjected to the membership of a journal in KAMJE by its score from initial and repeated evaluations (7 years after indexing). By 2011, 28 initial evaluations for 220 journals and 10 re-evaluations for 100 journals had been arranged. The evaluation is based on the quality of editorial board management, timeliness of publications, citation rates and journal indexing in international bibliographic databases such as PubMed. The evaluation is divided into three sections, each scored separately. The highest score is five. An average score of 2.5 was required for indexing before 2012 and higher than 3 after 2012.

The abstract retrieval in KoreaMed is facilitated by Naver, a local web portal, and Google (from 2006). Over the past

years, many journals have established links to the KoreaMed website. The number of visitors to KoreaMed has increased from 120,000 in 2006 to 587,000 in 2007 and 720,000 in 2008. As a result of improved visibility, eleven Korean medical journals were indexed by Science Citation Index (SCI) in 2008 and seven in 2009. Currently, 25 KAMJE-member journals are listed in SCI-Expanded (SciSearch®).

KoreaMed Synapse

KAMJE joined CrossRef in 2007 and started to tag with digital object identifiers (DOIs) individual articles of its member journals. Using the DOI links, a full-text platform named KoreaMed Synapse was launched.⁴ KoreaMed Synapse linked 117 local journals to cited references from all over the world. The platform helped to raise global awareness of Korean journals and their citation chances. The number of visitors to KoreaMed Synapse has exceeded that of the KoreaMed. Hits to KoreaMed Synapse reached the level of over one million in 2010.

Korean Medical Citation Index

In 2001, the Korean Academy of Medical Sciences initiated a project of Korean Medical Citation Index (KoMCI) in collaboration with KAMJE.⁵ The KoMCI publishes annual citation analysis and generates impact factors of KoreaMed journals. In 2012, the KoMCI project has been transferred to KAMJE and will be managed together with the KoreaMed and the KoreaMed Synapse.

Continuous activities of KAMJE

KAMJE activities, supported by the Korean Academy of Medical Sciences and other professional associations, have improved the quality and indexing chances of Korean medical journals (Table 1). Editors of the leading Korean medical journals now take responsibility for educating novice editors on editorial policies, standards of editing, scientific integrity, publication ethics, copyright issues and other topics of great interest to Korean authors, reviewers and editors. KAMJE members are now considering legitimate ways of increasing the citation rate of Korean journals to make them more influential globally.

The experience of KAMJE in editing and indexing scholarly journals was instrumental in building up the Western Pacific Region Index Medicus (WPRIM), a project of the WHO Western Pacific Regional Office, aimed at global accessibility of research publications from the region.⁶ In addition, the expansion of KAMJE activities led to the foundation of the Asian Pacific Association of Medical Journal Editors (APAME) in May 2008.

Problems and prospects of Korean medical journals

KAMJE experts officially encourage open access publishing as the driving force for better visibility and continuous improvement of the quality of its member journals. Opening access to full texts and making them freely available to the global readership is an advantage in the highly competitive journal publishing environment. In this regard, the current trend of archiving local journals in PubMed Central should be appreciated (Table 1).

Database/Platform	1996	2006	2009	2010	2012
PubMed/Medline	5	13	14	15	15
SciSearch	0	5	22	24	25
Scopus	-	-	30	41	64
PubMed Central	-	-	18	38	56
KoreaMed	-	119	156	168	187
KoreaMed Synapse	-	-	64	81	117

Table 1. Visibility of Korean medical journals in major international and local bibliographic databases and literature search platforms in 1996-2012

More effort is needed to maintain focus on Korean issues and widen the scope of the journals to reach a global audience. The Korean government currently encourages and supports the publication of global journals. This strategy stimulates Korean journals for their survival.

Paradoxically, in spite of the boost in Korean scholarly publishing, several problems have emerged. Thanks to the developments in various Korean disciplines, there is an unprecedented growth of the number of specialised associations. These associations are required to publish at least one journal for official registration. Nonetheless, the growing number of the newly launched medical journals, published by numerous speciality and subspeciality professional associations, is not accompanied by growth of high-quality articles. Most great submissions are still attracted by a handful of top global or Korean journals, which creates shortages of articles for most local journals and dampens their influence.

An option to overcome this problem could be to co-publish journals by professional associations with closely related scopes of interest. However, co-publication may also be problematic given the issues of sharing publishing costs, organising joint editorial boards, etc.

Another big issue for Korean journals is that governmental organisations do not sufficiently prioritise publications in local journals when reviewing research grant applications or hiring specialists for academic institutions. This issue should be overcome by upgrading local journals to global journals.

Acknowledgements

The authors are thankful to Prof. Armen Yuri Gasparyan for his professional comments and editing this essay.

References

- 1 KAMJE: Korean Association of Medical Journal Editors. Available at <http://kamje.or.kr> (accessed 31 August 2012)
- 2 Gasparyan AY. Familiarizing with science editors' associations. *Croatian Medical Journal* 2011;52(6):735-739. doi: 10.3325/cmj.2011.52.735
- 3 The KoreaMed. www.koreamed.org
- 4 The KoreaMed Synapse. www.synapse.koreamed.org
- 5 The Korean Medical Citation Index. www.komci.org
- 6 The WPRIM. http://www.wpro.who.int/publications/library_services/en/