

# Electronic-only case reports: solving a happy problem

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Perhaps I should start with the happy bits. The editorial board and staff of the Singapore Medical Journal (SMJ) are pleased to report a continuing increase in the number of manuscripts submitted to the SMJ. The figures tell all: 194 manuscripts received in 2003, 308 in 2004, 463 in 2005, and this year, we have had 651 submissions up to December 21, 2006. We are also happy with the growing internationalisation of the SMJ: 72% of our submitted manuscripts came from outside Singapore this year, up from 46% in 2003. The number of hits on the online SMJ through the link with PubMed has also showed an upward trend; this, together with the easy availability of the full text of every article published in the SMJ through the LinkOut feature of PubMed<sup>(1)</sup>, may be contributing factors to the increasingly large number of foreign manuscript submissions. Submissions from local authors have also increased annually from 105 in 2003, to 185 this year (as of December 21, 2006). In summary, the SMJ is in a very healthy state, submission-wise.

The problem actually arises from this success. A year ago, we identified the increasing trend in manuscript submissions and accepted papers, and made an effort to deal with this problem by increasing the number of pages per issue, necessitating changing the journal binding, and we also took the opportunity to revamp the cover design<sup>(2)</sup>. We are glad that the feedback to the revamped look has been positive. The *SMJ Editorial Manager*, our online manuscript processing and peer review system, officially launched in July 2006<sup>(3)</sup>, has resulted not only in speedier manuscript processing, reviewing and editorial decision times, but has also contributed to an increase in the number of manuscripts submitted and accepted within a shorter time period.

For submitted scientific articles, there have been an increasing proportion of case reports in relation to original articles, with the original article:case report ratio falling from 1.8:1 in 2004 to 1.1:1 in 2006. Currently (as of December 21, 2006), the SMJ has 95 case reports waiting to be published. The SMJ policy, inherited from the previous editor, has been to publish original articles in proportion to case reports with a ratio exceeding 2:1. The SMJ intends to continue this policy for the print version of the journal but doing so will clearly result in

a long waiting time for accepted case reports. Over the past three years, we have aimed, wherever possible, to try to ensure that all accepted articles are published within approximately six months of acceptance.

From January 1, 2007, all case reports submitted to the SMJ will henceforth be processed on the understanding that if eventually accepted, they will be published solely in the online version of the SMJ. This will allow us to publish more case reports per issue, without a corresponding increase in cost of each journal issue. In contrast to many other journals that have adopted the policy of doing away with case reports or markedly reducing their acceptance, the SMJ recognises the value of this paper category. Each electronic-only case report published in the SMJ will be fully citable in Index Medicus, and its complete text will be available through the LinkOut feature of PubMed. The abstract of each electronic-only case report will be printed in the hard copy of each issue of the SMJ, together with key details such as names of the authors, institution of the first author, email address of the corresponding author, as well as the full article citation (year, volume, electronic page number) for easy retrieval from PubMed and complete URL address. In short, there will not be any disadvantage to the authors of electronic-only case reports published in the SMJ.

In this interim period, for all case reports submitted on or before December 31, 2006 that have been accepted, authors are given the option of opting out of electronic-only publication. Authors are warned that priority will be given to publication of electronic-only case reports. We are pleased to note that the vast majority of authors who have had their case reports accepted to date have agreed to electronic-only publication. The SMJ Editorial Board however reserves the right to publish case reports in both the online and print versions of the SMJ, but this is expected to occur only in exceptional circumstances.

## REFERENCES

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