Journal of Medical Microbiology: global footprint and appointment of a regional Editorial Board

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Abstract

The *Journal of Medical Microbiology* has a global presence with an international Editorial Board. Asian countries such as PR China, India and Iran are prolific in the submission of manuscripts. Overall, the acceptance rate has been highest for European countries, the USA, Canada and Australia, and lowest for African, Asian and Latin American (LATAM) countries. The creation of regional Editors to assist the authors from these countries would serve the scientific community.

INTRODUCTION

The Microbiology Society (formerly The Society for General Microbiology (SGM)) was inaugurated at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine in 1945 (<https://microbiologysociety.org/why-microbiology-matters/our-history/a-history-of-the-microbiology-society.html>). The Society is a membership charity for scientists interested in micro-organisms and their effects and practical uses. It has grown to be one of the largest microbiology societies in Europe, with a worldwide membership. Now in its 53rd year, the *Journal of Medical Microbiology* (JMM) was first published in 1968 [1] by The Pathological Society of Great Britain and Ireland [2] and transferred to the Microbiology Society's predecessor (SGM) in 2002 [3]. As one of the flagship journals in the Microbiology Society portfolio, JMM serves a large community of scientists engaged in microbiological research relevant to human and animal health.

Over the years, JMM has undergone several revisions to its format and scope and expanded the repertoire of subjects covered, from microbes to microbiome relevant for clinical and public health outcomes. As part of the journal strategy and considering the international nature of its readership, the Society was prompted to examine JMM's governance, focusing on the Editorial Board, submissions and acceptance rates between 2015–2019.

EDITORIAL BOARD

To better represent the global readership, in 2017, the first non-UK Editor-in-Chief, Professor Kalai Mathee from Florida International University in the USA, was recruited, along with Dr Norman Fry of Public Health England. Both Fry and Mathee took the helm as co-Editors-in-Chief in 2017 [4]. Since then, the Editorial Board has diversified dramatically to include editors from Australia, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, India, Ireland, Italy, Kenya, Lebanon, Mexico, The Netherlands, Nigeria, the Republic of Korea, Spain, Taiwan, Thailand, the USA and the UK (Fig. 1). In addition, the Senior Editors (formerly Section Editors) also hail from different countries. However, there is a clear need to involve scientists from Asian and Latin American (LATAM) countries. The journal is also committed to improving the gender balance on the board and, at the time of writing, has 41% (20/49) female scientists, up from only 32% in 2018.

SUBMISSION

As our readership grew worldwide, so did the number of manuscripts submitted by authors. In the period 2015–19, the journal received 4299 manuscripts. The majority of the manuscripts came from Asia (48%), followed by 24% from European countries (Fig. 2). In Asia, most of the submissions originated from India (24%), PR China (23%), and Iran (20%). Among African countries, the most manuscripts were received from Egypt (131/313 manuscripts – 42%). In Europe, most submissions

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Abbreviations: JMM, *Journal of Medical Microbiology*; LATAM, Latin American.

Fig. 1. Distribution of *Journal of Medical Microbiology* Editorial Board.

were received from the UK (18%), followed by Greece (12%) and Spain (9%). Among the manuscripts received from the LATAM countries, Brazil contributed to the largest share with 22% of the submitted manuscripts. In contrast, the USA contributed to 65% of the manuscripts received from the Americas.

ACCEPTANCE

The acceptance rate for the manuscripts was not directly proportional to the submission rate. Overall, the acceptance rate was highest for European Countries, the USA, Canada

Fig. 2. Manuscript submission to the *Journal of Medical Microbiology*. The numerator and denominator indicate the number of manuscripts accepted and submitted, respectively.

Fig. 3. Average submission and acceptance rate for *Journal of Medical Microbiology* manuscripts for the period 2015–2019.

and Australia, and lowest for African, Asian and LATAM countries. The manuscripts from Australia enjoyed the highest acceptance rate at 58% (43/74 manuscripts), followed by the USA (48%), Canada (53%) and European countries at 40%. Within the European countries, the acceptance rates for the UK, The Netherlands and Spain were 60% (112/186 manuscripts), 75% (9/12 manuscripts) and 61% (35/57 manuscripts), respectively. The lowest acceptance rates were seen for manuscripts submitted from Asia at 20% (407/2082 manuscripts), LATAM America at 21% (98/465 manuscripts) and Africa at 10% (30/313 manuscripts). Among Asian countries, Japan saw the highest acceptance rate at 43% (79/185 manuscripts).

Further analyses of the countries that contributed on average more than 5 manuscripts per year during the 2015–19 period show that most manuscripts were received from India with 102 manuscripts/year, followed by PR China (98 manuscripts/year), Iran (83 manuscripts/year), Brazil (76 manuscripts/year), the USA (46 manuscripts/year) and the UK (37 manuscripts/year) (Fig. 3). The overall acceptance rates for India, PR China, Iran and Brazil are 16, 21, 12 and 22%, respectively. Interestingly the average acceptance rate for manuscripts from the UK and the USA is only slightly higher than that for China and India (Fig. 3).

CONCLUSION

A review of the JMM Editorial Board and manuscript submissions shows that the journal has a global reach. The current JMM Editors-in-Chief have made tremendous

efforts to recruit Editors worldwide to reflect the readership's demography. There should be continuous effort to ensure gender balance, diversity, and representation of the stakeholders, especially from India, PR China, Iran and Brazil.

The analyses of the submission and acceptance rate indicate that manuscripts from non-English speaking countries are disproportionately rejected. Some are dismissed genuinely due to poor science, but failure to communicate well-defined research to the reviewers has been a severe impediment to these scientists. Thus, we are introducing regional (Asian, African and LATAM) Editors who can assist the authors in improving their submissions. In this model, a regional Editor for LATAM countries would review all submissions from the region. If the quality of the science in the submitted manuscript were deemed acceptable, the regional Editors would then work with the authors to improve the manuscript quality. In addition, we would propose that the Microbiology Society offer regular webinars for potential authors on how to prepare manuscripts for submission.

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Author contributions

K. M. and N. F., performed conceptualization of ideas and writing. H. L., collated data. K. M., performed a formal analysis. All authors commented on and agreed on the final version.

Conflicts of interest

Norman Fry and Kalai Mathee are co-Editors-in-Chief for the *Journal of Medical Microbiology*, a Microbiology Society journal. Hilary Logan is the Journal Development Editor for the Microbiology Society with responsibility for the *Journal of Medical Microbiology*, *Access Microbiology* and the *International Journal of Systematic and Evolutionary Microbiology*. The authors declare no other conflicts of interest.

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