This editorial tracks progress from informal conversations in 2001 to the fifth anniversary publication of the *International Journal of Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork: Research Education and Practice*, the only open-source, peer-reviewed journal specifically dedicated to the scientific exploration of therapeutic massage practice and education.

**Keywords:**IJTMB, open-source publishing, open journal system, Massage Therapy Foundation

In 1991 the American Massage Therapy Association (AMTA) had the vision to create a new, independent but forever-connected organization, the Massage Therapy Foundation (MTF). The MTF was formed with the mission of advancing the practice of massage therapy by supporting scientific research, education, and community service.

From its inception, the MTF wanted to make good-quality research available to massage therapists. The problem was that articles about massage therapy research could appear in almost any kind of medical journal: nursing, physical therapy, occupational therapy, and general CAM journals all occasionally carried research about massage, but were almost all subscription-based and expensive. Our profession clearly needed a way to access massage therapy research efficiently and without constantly hitting the pay-for-access obstacle. To begin addressing this challenge, the MTF introduced a research database, providing links to relevant open-sourced, peer-reviewed articles through our website. Maintaining the database was problematic, however, and we knew that this wasn’t an adequate solution to the problem.

In 2001 Dr. Glenn Hymel and John Balletto, then President of the Massage Therapy Foundation, were in Quebec City at the AMTA annual meeting to present a workshop on using the MTF database. At dinner that night the thought struck them: “We should do our own journal!” An outgrowth of the database committee was formed and charged with gathering data on feasibility, possible management systems, and projected costs for a project like this. One early idea was that the journal could be published in-house and mailed out through the Foundation’s contact list. That seemed possible, but it carried some strong limitations, including high costs, limited staff capacity, and a bar to being indexed in important journal databases. Electronic publishing looked promising, but we lacked the expertise and capacity to do it well. Concrete plans for a journal stalled, but the vision persisted.

Then in 2007 Dr. Hymel attended a meeting about open-source publishing at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, BC. There he found representatives of Multimed Inc., a pioneer in open-source electronic journal publication. The company turned out to be a perfect match with our needs. Finally, after reviewing business plans, outlining ambitious goals, and setting appropriate metrics, the MTF Board of Trustees— under the visionary leadership of President Diana Thompson—voted to approve the organizational structure of the journal, settled on its name, and appointed its first editorial board, which consisted of Dr. Thomas Findley, Editor-in-Chief, Dr. Glenn Hymel, Executive Editor, Dr. Christopher Moyer, Research Section Editor, Dr. Paul Finch, Education Section Editor, and Dr. Karen Boulanger, Practice Section Editor.

The Volume 1, Number 1 edition of the *IJTMB* was published in August of 2008, carrying five editorials and two articles. It wasn’t until Volume 3, Number 1 (early 2010) that the Journal presented articles in all three sections. Special recognition and appreciation needs to be given to our earliest authors who published their work in the IJTMB before it was widely indexed. That was a true leap of faith, but it paid off. The consistently high standard that the Journal displayed allowed it to be indexed quickly in important international databases including Index Copernicus, Google Scholar, Hinari, Directory of Open Access Journals, CrossRef, Healthindex, Quertle, and—as of 2011 and after only three years of publication history— PubMed Central. For this achievement, which could not have happened without his guidance and drive, Dr. Hymel received the 2011 Distinguished Service Award from American Massage Therapy Association President Glenath Moyle.

The fact that the *IJTMB* has been an open-access journal from its beginning speaks volumes about the role of the Massage Therapy Foundation as a philanthropic organization, and its commitment to serving the massage therapy community at large. Our sense has always been that information is meant to be shared and that if evidence-informed practice is to become the norm among massage therapists, then that evidence needs to be absolutely as accessible as possible. It was a risky strategy that put the *IJTMB*among the minority of American academic journals, but our decision foresaw the more general movement toward open-access publishing that we experience today.

As an electronic journal, the *IJTMB* doesn’t have expenses linked to paper, ink, and postage, but we do invest substantial resources in our editorial board and our Open Journal System host. Unlike many open-access journals, we do not charge authors a fee to submit articles or to be published. We do offer advertising space, but this does little to offset production costs. Consequently, the *IJTMB* is one of the most expensive programs that the Foundation provides. We do it, and will continue to do it, because it is a service that our profession needs. This is demonstrated in the statistics about the Journal’s use: in 2008 we had 1,103 registered readers;([1](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3666596/#b1-ijtmb-6-1)) in 2013 we have 10,397.([2](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3666596/#b2-ijtmb-6-1)) And as research literacy improves and spreads throughout our profession, we expect that those numbers will continue to climb.

This edition celebrates the fifth anniversary of the *International Journal of Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork: Research, Education and Practice*. We have had some turnover since the early days; our editorial team is now composed of Antony Porcino, PhD as Executive Editor, Karen Boulanger, NCTMB, MS, PhD as Editor-in-Chief, Albert Moraska, PhD as Research Section Editor, Whitney Lowe, LMT as Education Section Editor, and Niki Munk, PhD, as Practice Section Editor. Glenn Hymel, EdD, LMT is our Senior Consulting Editor and Emeritus Founding Executive Editor, and Thomas W. Findlay, MD, PhD, is our Consulting Editor and Emeritus Founding Editor-in-Chief. It was my great honor as the President of the Massage Therapy Foundation to sign the papers that allowed the *IJTMB* to be indexed in Pubmed Central, and now to see it achieve its fifth anniversary. And I am proud to contribute to our profession’s only academic, peer-reviewed, open-source journal so that we may always, in the words of Dr. Glenn Hymel, “Look for the unanswered questions, and the unquestioned answers.

Three previous IJTMB editorials([1](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3312642/%22%20%5Cl%20%22b1-ijtmb-5-1-1)–[3](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3312642/#b3-ijtmb-5-1-1)) have documented the Journal’s progress from its inaugural issue in August 2008 to August 2011. In each of those earlier efforts, statistics were provided based primarily on journal performance in one-year time periods. As a reminder, the two major data sources were and still are (a) the IJTMB’s Google Analytics web statistics site and (b) the Statistics sector of the Journal’s own website.

This current editorial aggregates pertinent journal statistics across the IJTMB’s 3.5-year history thus far that extends from August 2008 to February 2012. Such a composite consideration of the journal’s activities and presumed impact should allow not only for a comprehensive retrospective, but also suggest a prospective view to guide future journal efforts.

[Table 1](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3312642/table/t1-ijtmb-5-1-1/) shows the aggregate statistics for only a pertinent subset of journal dimensions among several that are tracked by Google Analytics; viz., overview of site usage and visitors; international scope; new and returning visitors; and overview of traffic sources. Of particular note is the number of so-called unique visitors (i.e., unduplicated, counted-only-once, as in either “first time” or “prior” visitors specific to a selected date range; n = 77,581) considered against the backdrop of visits in toto (n = 105,629). These data, when considered in tandem with the number of new visitors (n = 77,398) vis-à-vis returning visitors (n = 28,231), may reflect encouragingly on the initial appeal of the Journal yet questionably on the Journal’s ability to sustain interest among those accessing the website. To assist in clarifying features of [Table 1](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3312642/table/t1-ijtmb-5-1-1/), Google Analytics provides an extensive Glossary as well as more detailed information regarding “Absolute Unique Visitors versus “New and Returning.”



[Table 1](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3312642/table/t1-ijtmb-5-1-1/)

Aggregate Web Statistics from Google Analytics for theInternational Journal of Therapeutic Massage & BodyworkSpanning the 3.5-Year Period from August 20, 2008–February 20, 2012

Indicative of the Journal’s intended international focus are the 176 different countries/territories represented by colleagues and other interested parties who have accessed the IJTMB’s website. This encouraging international range of exposure of the Journal would seem to suggest a diversity of contributing authors from various countries. To a certain extent that has, indeed, been the case in that 10 different countries are represented via journal entries thus far (viz., Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Portugal, and the United States). Naturally, the IJTMB seeks to increase substantially the number of nations represented by contributing authors and encourages inquiries from anyone who may be considering a manuscript submission.

[Tables 2](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3312642/table/t2-ijtmb-5-1-1/) and [​and33](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3312642/table/t3-ijtmb-5-1-1/) display the aggregate statistics compiled through the Open Journal Systems (OJS)software that was developed as part of Canada’s Public Knowledge Project and that drives the various features of the Journal’s website. The several dimensions as cited in [Table 2](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3312642/table/t2-ijtmb-5-1-1/) are obviously germane to the types of data typically tracked by professional/ academic journals, and address the principal features of the manuscript submission-through-review-through- publication process.



[Table 2](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3312642/table/t2-ijtmb-5-1-1/)

Aggregate Statistics from Canada’s Public Knowledge Project’s Open Journal Systems (OJS) for the International Journal of Therapeutic Massage & Bodywork Spanning the 3.5-Year Period from August 20, 2008–February 20, 2012 **...**



[Table 3](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3312642/table/t3-ijtmb-5-1-1/)

Ten Most Frequently Viewed IJTMB Articles Spanning the 3.5-Year Period from August 20, 2008–February 20, 2012

Based on the aforementioned Statistics sector of the Journal’s website and as shown in [Table 2](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3312642/table/t2-ijtmb-5-1-1/), the number of issues and items published through February 20, 2012, represents an average of six entries per journal issue. Considering the reality of six sections compromising the IJTMB—viz., Editorial, Research, Education, Practice, Commentary, and News/Announcements—this limited extent of content covered per issue is certainly not consistent with the Journal’s ongoing objective of approximately 9–12 entries per issue. Contributing to this fact, undoubtedly, is the total number of submissions equaling 147, for an average of 11 submissions (or potentially publishable items) per issue thus far. The data pertaining to number of peer reviewed items and subsequent decisions to accept, decline, or resubmit are encouraging when considered in the context of days to review and days to publication averages of 35 and 61, respectively. On the average, then, manuscript submissions are being reviewed in a timely manner with subsequent publication within a two-month time frame. The categories of registered users and readers are each approaching the 10,000 mark, although a context for interpreting these data in a meaningful way has yet to be identified given the 3.5 years since the Journal’s inaugural issue. The dimension labeled article view counts cites 243,654 hits across the 82 items published, with 39% of those hits (i.e., 95,149) accounted for by only the top 10 articles eliciting readers’ attention.

Although earlier versions were presented in aggregate form via the September 2010 and 2011 editorials([2](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3312642/#b2-ijtmb-5-1-1)–[3](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3312642/#b3-ijtmb-5-1-1)), an updated rendition of the 10 most frequently viewed IJTMB articles appears in [Table 3](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3312642/table/t3-ijtmb-5-1-1/). Still garnering by far the largest number of views with a count of 26,171 is the article by Zalta**([4](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3312642/%22%20%5Cl%20%22b4-ijtmb-5-1-1))** that originally (i.e., pre-publication) merited the Massage Therapy Foundation’s 2007 Practitioner Case Report Gold Award. And still maintaining an approximately similar rank ordering as before—with the addition of one new entry—are the following articles (and corresponding topics) spanning a range of “hits” extending from 12,619 to 5,069 views: Van der Wal**(**[**5**](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3312642/#b5-ijtmb-5-1-1)**)**, Minasny**(**[**6**](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3312642/#b6-ijtmb-5-1-1)**)**, and Findley**(**[**7**](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3312642/#b7-ijtmb-5-1-1)**)**—fascia research specific; Grant et al.**(**[**8**](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3312642/#b8-ijtmb-5-1-1)**)**— massage therapy guidelines; LeMoon**(**[**9**](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3312642/#b9-ijtmb-5-1-1)**)**—clinical reasoning; Kania et al.**(**[**10**](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3312642/#b10-ijtmb-5-1-1)**)**—qualitative research in massage; Porcino and MacDougall**(**[**11**](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3312642/#b11-ijtmb-5-1-1)**)**—integrated taxonomy of healthcare; Moyer et al.**(**[**12**](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3312642/#b12-ijtmb-5-1-1)**)**—workshop report from complementary and integrative medicine research conference; and Adams et al.**(**[**13**](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3312642/#b13-ijtmb-5-1-1)**)**—pain management. Considerations admittedly not factored into this listing, yet undoubtedly influencing the number of hits registered, are variables such as (a) length of time since publication, (b) originating context of an article such as a research competition or a conference presentation, (c) principal intended audiences/readership, and (d) ancillary communications with specifically-targeted audiences/readership in mind.

The three earlier editorials cited at the outset([1](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3312642/#b1-ijtmb-5-1-1)–[3](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3312642/#b3-ijtmb-5-1-1)) provide a 2008 to 2011 year-over-year comparison for assessing the Journal’s progress. The aggregate statistics presented in [Tables 1](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3312642/table/t1-ijtmb-5-1-1/)–[3](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3312642/table/t3-ijtmb-5-1-1/) of this current editorial are likewise only descriptive in nature and represent what might be thought of as simply a “state of the journal” compilation. Among the several implications of these aggregate statistics as presented—some of which have been alluded to in the preceding discussion—are the following that might be deemed most pressing: (a) The retention of visitors beyond their initial visit to the journal needs to be increased beyond the current 27% of total visits represented by past returning visitors; (b) Of the 176 countries/territories represented by colleagues and others accessing the Journal, an increase in contributing authors beyond the 10 countries now represented would certainly advance the international intent of the journal; (c) An increase in the average number of manuscript submissions per journal issue is obviously prerequisite to approaching the desired average number of 9–12 published entries per issue; (d) With respect to article view count statistics, 10 of the 82 items published (12%) account for 92,149 of the total 243,654 hits registered (39%). Insights gleaned from pre- and post-publication circumstances surrounding these most frequently-accessed articles may suggest future strategies for encouraging published entries that attract and sustain an ever-increasing readership.

Thus far, the analyses provided reflect only year-over- year comparisons spanning three years and aggregate statistics at the current 3.5-year mark. Future efforts to track the IJTMB’s development and impact, however, would be considerably enhanced by the addition of still-to-be-determined resources and analyses allowing for a comparison of the IJTMB with similar journals that are peer-reviewed and open access in nature. One possible starting point—though admittedly quite ambitious—might be that of investigating aggregate statistics specific to a subset of comparable journals listed among the 789 publications in the Health Sciences Sector of the Directory of Open Access Journals. A second possibility that is maybe even more challenging, yet perhaps more appropriate by virtue of the parallel nature of the statistics provided, would be a consideration of the Public Knowledge Project’s listing of journals in North America using the OJS software (specifically, n = 1,343 journals). Additionally, an eventual third possible performance metric for the IJTMB must be that of the Thomson Reuters Impact Factor. At the risk of over-simplification, the annual impact factor for a journal is a ratio between citations and recent citable items published. More specifically, it is the ratio between (a) the number of citations in a given year to articles published in the preceding two-year period, and (b) the number of articles published in that preceding two-year period.

With the two preceding paragraphs in mind, the bottom line is that variants of “within-journal” and “between-journal” analyses are critical to ensuring that the IJTMB’s continued advancement is predicated on the best evidence that can be mustered. Future retrospectives on the Journal will indeed be enhanced if these combined and more robust analyses are incorporated