

Editorial

The hills and valleys of an impact factor

Every year, the Institute of Scientific Information® publishes its impact factor (IF) for thousands of scientific journals, and every year, editors, authors and reviewers alike wait with bated breath for the newest figures to be released. This bibliometric parameter has become the quintessential measure of a journal's status among its peers. In fact, scientific careers can even hang in the balance when an IF plummets below a certain threshold, as it has become common practice for applicants for academic positions to be rated according to the IF of the journals in which they have published.

When this editorial goes to press, the IF for 2004 will have been released. After applauding the 2003 figure of 5.164, we at *Cardiovascular Research* have been anticipating a decline in our IF for this year to below 5.0 due to a technical factor that will be explained below. At this point, we want to let our readers and authors know that according to our predictions, which have been quite accurate over the years, you can expect another upswing in the Journal's IF next year (Fig. 1). Thus, the general upward trend experienced over the last decade will continue with the occasional hills and valleys to be expected in the normal course of a journal's development.

Cardiovascular Research's 2004 impact factor, which is a measure of the citation of 2002 and 2003 articles during the year of 2004, was heavily influenced by an increased number of total articles published in 2003. In 2003 we published 352 articles, whereas in 2002 there were only 293. Of the 2 years considered in the calculation of the

2004 IF (2002 and 2003), 2003 contributes less to the numerator (citations) than 2002, simply because the chances of articles published during 2003 being cited during 2004 are much lower. However, both 2002 and 2003 contribute equally to the denominator (number of articles published). This imbalance towards a larger number of articles published in the second year of a given period will thus automatically result in a drop in the calculated impact factor. By publishing more articles in 2003, we had hoped, in our first year at the helm of the Journal, to reduce our backlog of manuscripts waiting to be published and to speed up the time from acceptance to publication. However, this backfired and contributed to a temporary decline in the IF.

The Editorial Team has great expectations for next year's IF, which will include articles published in 2004. Our articles published last year have thus far received more citations to date than papers from any other year in the Journal's history within a similar timeframe. Most notably, the Spotlight Issue on Reperfusion Injury published in February of 2004 (Vol. 61, Issue 3) has received the greatest amount of attention, both in terms of items downloaded from the online website as well as citations published in the literature. Thus, our estimate for the 2005 IF lies close to 5.5 (Fig. 1). When the effects of our "learning curve" during the year of 2003 have worn off in 2006 and beyond, we expect to resume our steady course toward greater recognition and an expanded readership.

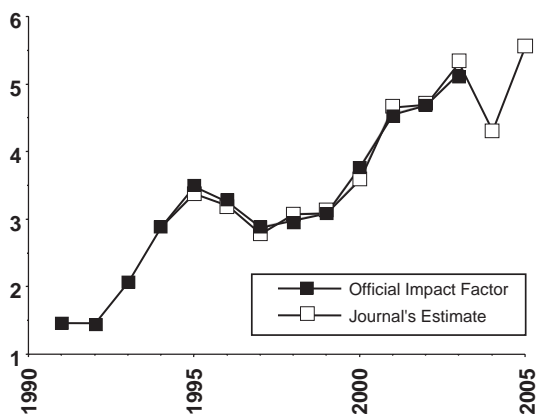


Fig. 1. Officially published impact factor (ISI Journal Citation Reports®) and predicted impact factor based on a month-to-month survey of citations.

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