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Letter to the Editor

A need for accuracy during bibliometric assessments

Dear Editor,

In the last few years, the field of bibliometrics has turned into a trend as access to most databases is widespread, these are user-friendly and results can be easily obtained. However, several problems may rise due to the misuse and misinterpretation of the data [1]. As any other scientific field, bibliometrics requires a complete understanding of the metrics involved to avoid adverse effects. Unfortunately, the recently published letter to the editor that analyzed West Nile Virus presented data that seemed peculiar [2]. To begin with, the letter to the editor refers to the publication outcome of countries as "number of articles". In bibliometrics, one of the aspects we are concerned about is the type of documents being published. Thus, documents could be categorized as "review", "article", "conference paper", "note", letter, "book chapter", editorial", etc. Therefore, referring to published documents as articles throughout the manuscript is misleading.

Another parameter that needed to be included was the time period being analyzed. Since the letter to the editor [2] lacked this information, we repeated the query using "West Nile Virus" in all databases with a date range that ended in 2016 (in an attempt to emulate the previous study).

From Scopus, a total of 7024 documents were retrieved since 1943 (2 documents were published that year), of which 3468 (49.4%) were from the United States, followed by France with 359 documents (5.1%) and Canada (321 documents, 4.6%). Comparing these data to Table 1 [2], we could assume that we are using the same Scopus date range. However, another issue with that table was that it combined the query search of four databases. What was the purpose of that? It is a well-known fact that Scopus not only includes more journals than Medline, SciELO and LILACS, but there is a significant overlap of the journals indexed [3]. A simple search on the web reveals that Scopus indexes 22,748 journals, while Medline indexes 5634 journals, SciELO 1249 journals and LILACS 923 journals. Therefore, the column that indicates the database with the highest number of articles is redundant.

In the case of the other databases, the results were different from previously reported. From GoPubMed (www.scielo.org) we retrieved 5887 documents that dated from 1957 until 2016. In the case of SciELO, the same query search resulted in 62 documents retrieved from 1998 onwards, instead of 10 as reported.

Ultimately, the total number of publications does not provide an indication of research quality and significance. The misinterpretation of this indicator may derive in erroneous conclusions during the process of research assessment.

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Competing interests

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Ethical approval

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