Review Article

Science production in Iran: the scenario of Iranian medical journals

Farzaneh Aminpour*,b, Payam Kabiri*c

Abstract

In Iran, the number of published articles has increased significantly in the basic and applied sciences including medicine and its subspecialties during the recent years. The present study reviewed Iranian science production in medicine, focusing on Iranian medical journals and assessing the current status of Iranian medical journals in several information databases. The study revealed that only a few number of Iranian biomedical journals were indexed by Web of Science, Medline, Scopus and Biological abstract, but most of them have been covered by Index Copernicus and Index Medicus for Eastern Mediterranean Region. Observing some important factors such as journal's basic publishing standards may increase the number of Iranian medical journals indexed by reputable information databases and improve Iranian contribution to the world science.

KEYWORDS: Scientific Productivity, Research Performance, Medical Journals, Information Databases, Iran.

Quality of health services strongly depends on production, publication, dissemination and application of updated biomedical knowledge in order to prevent and treat diseases and improve health services. James Grant, the former executive director of UNICEF, remarked: "The most urgent task before us is to get medical and health knowledge to those most in need of that knowledge. Of the approximately 50 million people who were dying each year in the late 1980s, fully two thirds could have been saved through the application of that knowledge."

Due to the major role of research in sustainable development of countries, research policies should be formulated according to the updated information on science production and research output of each country. The number of published articles of a country is a frequently used scientometric indicator of the scientific position of that country.

Scintometric indicators such as "number of papers", "number of citations" and "citation per paper" have become increasingly important as instruments for analyzing scientific activities and their relationship with economic and social development. They can appraise the performance and improvement of national science and technology.

The quality and the quantity of published articles of each country indexed by reputable databases are important in determining the country's contribution to the world science and status in international academic rankings.

In Iran, the number of published articles has increased significantly in the basic and applied sciences including medicine and its subspecialties during the recent years. In 2006, Butler reported that Iran after Turkey stood in the second position amongst Islamic countries according to the number of published papers. About 25.6% of total Iranian scientific publica-

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tions have been devoted to biomedicine and biochemistry during 1995 to 1999.\(^5\) Malekzadeh et al showed that from 1993 to 1998, Iranian indexed articles by Web of Science experienced an annual increase of 25%.\(^6\)

The number of medical journals published around the world has been continuously increased during the recent decades.\(^7\) In Iran, the number of medical journals increased from 8 in 1979 to 146 in 2009. During 1993 to 1998, less than 7% of Iranian scientific articles appeared in international reputable databases.\(^6\) This poor percentage may be due to low number of Iranian journals indexed by Web of Science and Medline. Improving the quality of Iranian journals along with their quantity may be the best solution. Some researchers reported a positive correlation between the qualitative and quantitative criteria in the Iranian scholarly scientific publications indexed by Web of Science.\(^8\) However, it seems that rapid increase in the number of Iranian journals has led to depletion in their content and to their timeliness of publication.\(^6\)

In the present study, all Iranian medical journals accredited by the Commission for Accreditation and Improvement of Iranian Medical Journals (CAIMJ) have been reviewed. The main goal of this review was to assess the presence of Iranian medical journals in several information databases including Web of Science (WOS), Medline, Scopus, Biological Abstracts (BA), Index Copernicus (IC) and Index Medicus for Eastern Mediterranean Region (IMEMR). The conclusion includes some practical suggestions for improving international academic impacts of Iranian medical journals.

### Iranian Scientific Production

Iran experienced a significant development in all branches of science especially in medical science over the recent decades. According to the 2009 January update of Essential Science Indicators (ESI) Iran has achieved Rising Star status in three fields of clinical medicine, microbiology, and biology and biochemistry. The report was based on the total citations increase from June to August 2008.\(^9\)

### Table 1. Rankings of all scientific fields in Iran during 1996-2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Papers</th>
<th>Citations</th>
<th>Citations Per Paper</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Chemistry</td>
<td>6,609</td>
<td>27,639</td>
<td>4.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Physics</td>
<td>2,080</td>
<td>8,247</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Clinical Medicine</td>
<td>2,188</td>
<td>6,248</td>
<td>2.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>3,236</td>
<td>6,052</td>
<td>1.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Pharmacology &amp; Toxicology</td>
<td>622</td>
<td>2,207</td>
<td>3.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Plant &amp; Animal Science</td>
<td>1,262</td>
<td>1,963</td>
<td>1.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Materials Science</td>
<td>1,073</td>
<td>1,885</td>
<td>1.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Biology &amp; Biochemistry</td>
<td>610</td>
<td>1,578</td>
<td>2.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Neuroscience &amp; Behavior</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>1,209</td>
<td>3.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Agricultural Sciences</td>
<td>469</td>
<td>998</td>
<td>2.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Geosciences</td>
<td>471</td>
<td>879</td>
<td>1.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>844</td>
<td>812</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Environment/Ecology</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>808</td>
<td>2.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Molecular Biology &amp; Genetics</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>635</td>
<td>4.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Immunology</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>538</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Psychiatry/Psychology</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>495</td>
<td>3.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Computer Science</td>
<td>506</td>
<td>391</td>
<td>0.77</td>
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<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Space Science</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>2.20</td>
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<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Social Sciences, General</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>209</td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Economics &amp; Business</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 presents the ranking of all science fields in Iran during 1996 to 2006. As shown in this table, clinical medicine ranked third after chemistry and physics according to the total citations. An analysis by ESI revealed that Iran with a total number of 21,661 papers, 63,519 citations and average 2.93 citations per paper ranked 42nd for papers, 49th for citations and 135th for citations per paper among 146 top performing countries in all fields.  

Several studies confirmed an increase in scientific production in all fields in Iran. Saboury evaluated Iranian papers in Web of Science from 1993 to 2002 and compared research status of Iran with other Asian countries. He concluded that the percentage of Iranian scientific production experienced a relatively good increase during the mentioned time span. Osareh and Marefat studied scientific growth of Iranian researchers based on Medline database from 1976 to 2003 and reported a sharp increase in Iranian science production towards the end of that time span. Moin et al also evaluated the scientific output of Iran from 1967 to 2003 and compared Iran with 15 countries in the year 2000. Accordingly, Iranian contribution to science increased from 0.0003% in 1970 to 0.29% in 2003. Based on the ratio of science output to GNP, Iran stood on thirteenth place among 16 countries in year 2000. Aminpour and Kabiri reported a remarkable increase in the indexed papers of a major Iranian medical university by Medline and Web of Science during 2000 to 2006. Another study also evaluated all types of research output of Isfahan University of Medical Sciences including research projects, books, journal articles and conference proceedings in 2006 and found a 100% increase in all types of scientific productions of this university compared to 2005. Out of all published articles, 74.2% appeared in domestic medical journals while only 25.8% were published in foreign journals. Noroozi et al compared Iran, Turkey and Egypt scientific productions indexed in WOS through 2005 to 2006. According to this study Turkey, Iran and Egypt stood in the first, second and third places, respectively, among the Middle East countries.

Commission for Accreditation and Improvement of Iranian Medical Journals

Most of Iranian biomedical journals are published by Iranian medical universities and accredited by the Commission for Accreditation and Improvement of Iranian Medical Journals (CAIMJ). CAIMJ has been directed by Iranian Ministry of Health and Medical Education, Deputy of Research since 1994. The commission has been set up to appraise and accredit Iranian biomedical journals and is also responsible for evaluating new requests of Iranian medical journals for accreditation, while continuously evaluating current accredited journals.

At the present time, CAIMJ has 9 active subcommittees in specific fields such as indexing and peer reviewing. The commission also encourages journals to setup electronic versions through their websites, preparing XML feed needed for better indexing and searching by information databases. CAIMJ’s new project is development of a ranking criterion to evaluate and sort out accredited journals accordingly. CAIMJ members include Iranian health minister, vice chancellor for research, vice chancellor for education, medical information manager of the ministry, a representative of academic promotion committee, 8 selective academic members of Iranian medical universities and the commission secretary.

Iranian Medical Journals

Due to the integration of medical education and health services in Iran, the ministry of health and medical education is responsible for medical publishing in the country. Most of Iranian medical journals are accredited by CAIMJ and founded by medical universities. However, there are a few published by non-governmental associations. Therefore, from financial and administrative points of view Iranian medical journals are mainly supported and ruled by governmental budgets and poli-
cies, while only a few journals have private expenditure and independent policy.

It seems that insufficient funding amongst other deficiencies is a major problem in administrating the majority of the Middle Eastern medical journals.\(^17\) Moreover, most of the Iranian medical journals have general titles and accordingly have general scopes in publishing biomedical articles. Only few journals are focused on specific specialties in biomedicine. Furthermore, the original language of the majority of Iranian medical journals is Persian, while most accredited information databases have a strong tendency for indexing English language journals.

Although reliable studies revealed considerable improvement in Iranian science production and in its global academic ranking, only few Iranian journals have been indexed by reputable databases like Web of Science and Medline. According to the Journal Citation Reports (JCR) only 3 Iranian journals were indexed in Web of Science until 2005.

One of the main reasons for the improvement of Iranian scientific ranks in regional and international academic ranking systems is the growing process of indexing Iranian journals especially medical journals by major information databases. According to Akbari Sari, the present director of CAIMJ, most Iranian medical journals have been indexed in Index Medicus for the Eastern Mediterranean Region and Index Copernicus. He reported that out of 134 Iranian medical journals, 52 were in general fields while 82 journals were related to specific fields in medicine and health science. Ninety eight journals were in Persian language but most of them included English abstracts as well. The remaining 36 were in English and most of them covered specific topics in medicine. He believed that although the quality and quantity of Iranian medical journals were rapidly increasing, a large number of them needed further improvement to be indexed in major international databases.\(^18\) By increasing the quality and decreasing publication frequency of the journals, a larger number of Iranian journals may find suitable places in reputable databases.\(^19\)

As most of Iranian medical journals are published by medical universities, they often follow the research policies of their related universities. Aminpour et al argued that the dominant policy of most Iranian medical universities in offering universities web pages and educational contents in Persian language is an important obstacle for being internationally well known.\(^20\)

According to table 2, 16 Iranian medical journals are indexed by Web of Science. Therefore, it is predictable that total number of WOS indexed articles published by Iranian journals and the probable citations they receive will increase in future. Web of Science is available via Thomson Reuters ISI Web of Knowledge and covers over 10,000 of the highest impact journals worldwide, including data in the sciences, social sciences, arts, and humanities across 256 disciplines. It is noteworthy that recently new 1,228 journals were added to the journal coverage of WOS. From which 322 journals were from Asia Pacific, 647 from the European Union, 135 from Latin America, 105 from the Middle East and Africa, and 19 from North America. Notably, South Africa, Turkey and Iran with 19, 14 and 11 journals, respectively had the highest coverage in the Middle East and Africa region.\(^21\) Out of 141 Iranian medical journals, only 5 journals including Urology Journal, Iranian Biomedical Journal, Archives of Iranian Medicine, Iranian Journal of Immunology and Iranian Journal of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology are indexed by Medline, which is a premier bibliographic database in medical science containing over 17 million bibliographic data from over 5,200 worldwide journals.\(^22\) The original language of all Iranian medical journals indexed by Medline is English.

Eighteen Iranian medical journals including English and Persian language journals have been indexed by Scopus. Scopus is a large abstract and citation database covering approximately 36 million records of 16,000 peer
reviewed journals from more than 4,000 international publishers.\textsuperscript{23,24}

According to the current review, "DARU" published by Tehran university of medical sciences is the first Iranian medical journal indexed by WOS and the only Iranian medical journal indexed by Biological Abstracts (BA). Biological Abstracts is a bibliographic database covering over 11.3 million records of 4,200 journals from 100 countries.\textsuperscript{25} DARU has been published only in Persian language from 1991 to 1995, in Persian with English abstract from 1995 to 1999 and only in English from early 1999 as a quarterly journal. The main scope of this journal is pharmaceutical science.\textsuperscript{26}

On the other hand, 92 Iranian biomedical journals are indexed by Index Medicus for Eastern Mediterranean Region (IMEMR). IMEMR is a cumulative index directed by WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region Office (EMRO). It covers journals published on health issues in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, including countries like Iran, Afghanistan, Cyprus, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia and Yemen.\textsuperscript{27}

Most Iranian medical journals (115 journals) including English and Persian language journals have been covered by Index Copernicus (IC). This may be related to the multi-lingual and multi-cultural manner of this database and its relatively quick and easy process of registering professional journals.\textsuperscript{28}

\textbf{Approaches to Increase The Coverage of Iranian Medical Journals by Reputable Databases}

Many qualitative and quantitative factors are considered by reputable information databases when evaluating a journal for indexing.\textsuperscript{29,30} The most important criteria which should be considered by Iranian journals' editorial boards are journal's basic publishing standards, timeliness of publication, editorial content, international diversity of authorship, citation data, international editorial conventions, providing content or at least bibliographic information in English, and the use of peer review process.

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\caption{Bibliographic information and indexing status of iranian medical journals}\label{tab:table2}
\begin{tabular}{|c|l|l|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
No & Journal Name & Publisher & Language & Frequency & WOS & Medline & Scopus & BA & IMEMR & IC \\
\hline
1 & Journal of the Faculty of Medicine & Shaheed Beheshti Univ. Med. Sci. & Persian & Quarterly & * & * &  &  &  &  \\
3 & Iranian Journal of Medical Sciences & Shiraz Univ. Med. Sci. & English & Quarterly & * & * &  &  &  &  \\
5 & Medical Journal of Tabriz University of Medical Sciences & Tabriz Univ. Med. Sci. & Persian & Quarterly & * & * &  &  &  &  \\
6 & Journal of Medical Council of Islamic Republic of Iran & Medical Council of Islamic Republic of Iran & Persian & Quarterly & * & * &  &  &  &  \\
7 & TEB VA TAZKIEH & Ministry of Health and Medical Education & Persian & Quarterly & * & * &  &  &  &  \\
9 & DARU & Tehran Univ. Med. Sci. & English & Quarterly & * & * &  &  &  &  \\
10 & Journal of Kerman University of Medical Sciences & Kerman Univ. Med. Sci. & Persian & Quarterly & * & * &  &  &  &  \\
13 & Journal of Guilan University of Medical Sciences & Guilan Univ. Med. Sci. & Persian & Quarterly & * & * &  &  &  &  \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Journal Name</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>WOS</th>
<th>Medline</th>
<th>Scopus</th>
<th>BA</th>
<th>KESAR</th>
<th>IC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Iranian Journal of Nuclear Medicine</td>
<td>Tehran Univ. Med. Sci.</td>
<td>Persian</td>
<td>Bimonthly</td>
<td>*</td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>BINA</td>
<td>Eye Bank of I.R. Iran</td>
<td>Persian</td>
<td>Quarterly</td>
<td>*</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>Iranian Journal of Psychiatry and Clinical Psychology</td>
<td>Iran Univ. Med. Sci.</td>
<td>Persian</td>
<td>Quarterly</td>
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<td>PEGOUHANDEH</td>
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<td>Persian</td>
<td>Bimonthly</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Journal of Shahid Sadoughi University of Medical Sciences and Health Services</td>
<td>Shahid Sadoughi Univ. Med. Sci.</td>
<td>Persian</td>
<td>Quarterly</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Scientific Journal of Hamedan University of Medical Sciences</td>
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<td>Quarterly</td>
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<td>Persian</td>
<td>Quarterly</td>
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<td>Persian</td>
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<td>26</td>
<td>Daneshvar Medicine</td>
<td>Shahed University</td>
<td>Persian</td>
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<td>Journal of Research in Medical Sciences</td>
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<td>*</td>
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<td>Persian</td>
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<td>30</td>
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<td>Infectious Diseases and Tropical Medicine Research Center</td>
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<td>Quarterly</td>
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<td>43</td>
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Moreover, most of the Iranian medical journals have general scopes instead of focusing on specific specialties in biomedicine. Whether this has any significant impact on being indexed by reputable information databases is remained to be determined by future studies. Observing the above mentioned factors may increase the number of Iranian medical journals indexed by reputable databases.

**How to Increase Iranian Contribution to The World Science**

According to the current review, some approaches may promote Iranian contribution to the world science. One is to increase the number of Iranian articles published through foreign indexed journals. The other is to improve the quality of Iranian medical journals in order to get indexed by reputable information databases such as Web of Science and Medline.

Observing the qualitative and the quantitative indexing factors of reputable databases by Iranian medical journals is of great importance. In this way, Iranian published articles in domestic medical journals may be indexed by such databases and subsequently they would be considered in international academic rankings. This may improve Iranian contribution to the world science and promote Iran's scientific ranks in regional and international academic rankings.

**Conflict of Interests**

Authors have no conflict of interests.

**Authors' Contributions**

FA carried out the design and coordinated the study, and prepared the manuscript. PK provided assistance in the design of the study and participated in preparing the manuscript. All authors have read and approved the content of the manuscript.

**References**

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