Online Publication and the Impact Factor

KEY WORDS
- bibliometrics
- journal impact factor
- occupational therapy
- publications

T
his volume year of the American Journal of Occupational Therapy (AJOT) will mark the commencement of the journal’s online publication. Online publication will increase the journal’s access to a wide audience, both nationally and internationally, and beyond the profession to the larger scientific and lay communities. Greater open access of AJOT publications ushers in an opportunity for the profession to increase its visibility and strengthen its perceived societal value. At no other time in history has the profession been offered this unique opportunity to demonstrate that it is a science-driven, evidence-based, and effective service inextricably interwoven with the restoration and preservation of human health.

Journal Impact Factor

One measure of a profession’s perceived value by the larger scholarly community is the journal impact factor calculated by Journal Citation Reports (Garfield, 2006). The impact factor is a numerical measure indicating the number of citations that a journal receives for all articles published within 2- and 5-year periods (i.e., each journal has a separate 2-year and 5-year impact factor score; Chew, Villanueva, & Van Der Weyden, 2007). The impact factor is believed to indicate how widely received and influential a given journal’s publications are. A journal with a high 2-year impact factor is thought to publish articles that are widely received and quickly used by the scholarly community. When a journal’s 5-year impact factor is higher than its 2-year impact factor, it commonly indicates that the journal requires a longer time for its publications to be read and cited; yet, such literature may be more durable over time. For example, AJOT has always had higher 5- and 10-year impact factor scores than 2-year scores (Holguin, 2009). Often, journals having the highest 2-year impact factors emerge from professions generating knowledge that can be life saving and must be disseminated and used quickly (e.g., emergency medicine). Table 1 provides examples of 2- and 5-year impact factor scores for several health care journals.

Journals with the highest impact factors are considered to have the greatest societal impact and are perceived to be the most prestigious (Saha, Saint, & Christakis, 2003). Today, the impact factors of journals from a specific profession have come to reflect that profession’s contribution to society—whether accurately or not. Increasingly, universities use impact factors to make decisions regarding tenure and promotion (Monastersky, 2005). Grant funders also use impact factor scores to make decisions about funding awards (Dong, Loh, & Mondry, 2005). Certainly, the prestige and ranking of institutions of higher learning reflect the publication and grant histories of their faculty.

Currently, only two occupational therapy journals are ranked in the Journal Citation Reports and have impact factor scores—AJOT and OTJR: Occupation, Participation and Health. However, two additional occupational therapy journals

Sharon A. Gutman, PhD, OTR, FAOTA
will be added to the Journal Citation Reports in the next year: Scandinavian Journal of Occupational Therapy and Australian Occupational Therapy Journal. The pressure to publish in journals having higher impact factors has caused many of the profession’s leading researchers to publish outside of the profession’s own journals (Holguin, 2009). In addition to external pressures, many occupational therapy researchers have sought publication in journals outside of the profession to reach a wider audience (Dirette, Rozich, & Viau, 2009). With online publication and greater open access, however, occupational therapy researchers can reach a wide audience and still publish in the profession’s journals.

When occupational therapy researchers publish in non–occupational therapy journals, that research often fails to be perceived as having been generated by the profession and by occupational therapy researchers. Consequently, some of occupational therapy’s best research is lost to the profession. When the scholarly community examines the impact factor of the profession’s journals, it is assumed that the profession’s research contribution to society has been neither significant nor of great impact. As members of the profession, it is time that we take responsibility for building our profession’s knowledge base instead of engaging in research practices that are ultimately detrimental—such as publishing primarily in non–occupational therapy journals and conducting research that does not examine the effectiveness, time and cost efficiency, client satisfaction, and safety of occupational therapy interventions.

Table 1. Examples of 2007 2- and 5-Year Impact Factor Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Journal</th>
<th>2-Year Impact Factor</th>
<th>5-Year Impact Factor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Journal of Occupational Therapy</td>
<td>0.921</td>
<td>1.184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTJR: Occupation, Participation and Health</td>
<td>0.360</td>
<td>0.510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Journal of Speech–Language Pathology</td>
<td>1.951</td>
<td>2.041</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Therapy</td>
<td>2.190</td>
<td>2.844</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archives of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation</td>
<td>2.159</td>
<td>2.774</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal of the American Medical Association</td>
<td>31.71E</td>
<td>27.957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New England Journal of Medicine</td>
<td>50.017</td>
<td>49.911</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Call for Action

Online publication has the potential to help the profession meet the Centennial Vision goal of becoming “a powerful, widely recognized, science-driven, and evidence-based profession with a globally connected and diverse workforce meeting society’s occupational needs” (American Occupational Therapy Association [AOTA], 2007, p. 613). But such a goal can be realized only if occupational therapy researchers make a commitment to the profession. As AJOT’s editor in chief, I am asking our researchers to consider the following as a professional responsibility:

- Submit some percentage of your work to AJOT or to other occupational therapy journals indexed in Journal Citation Reports.
- Encourage doctoral students to understand the professional necessity of conducting effectiveness studies and submitting research articles to AJOT or to other occupational therapy journals having high impact factors.
- Before accepting faculty positions, negotiate for tenure and promotion decisions to be based, in part, on publication in occupational therapy journals rather than in non–occupational therapy journals with higher impact factors.
- Finally, think about the long-term cost to the profession of losing some of our best research to non–occupational therapy journals.

As part of the journal’s commitment to the Centennial Vision, we will monitor and report on the status of AJOT’s impact factor over the next years. It is our goal to steadily increase the journal’s impact factor until it is at least on par with those of equivalent rehabilitation journals. Online publication will ultimately enhance the journal’s impact factor by enabling publication ahead of print (thus facilitating the time it takes to disseminate accepted articles) and provide exposure of published articles to a much wider audience. Because we anticipate an incremental increase in the amount of issues published per year (through the addition of issues available online), the number of potentially cited articles published per year will increase. But a significant and sustained positive change in our impact factor will largely depend on occupational therapy researchers’ commitment to build the profession’s evidence base by publishing in our own journals and raising the quality of research published in those journals. It is imperative that we examine the cost of placing our best research in non–occupational therapy journals and instead develop strategies through which both the researcher and the profession can simultaneously benefit.

References


January/February 2010, Volume 64, Number 1
Dear Colleagues,

In accordance with the Institute of Medicine’s recent report calling for additional studies to determine the most effective and cost-efficient practice methods (Eden, Wheatley, McNeil, & Sox, 2008; Sox & Greenfield, 2009), AJOT is embarking on an initiative to increase the number of effectiveness studies published in the journal. Such research is critical to support occupational therapy’s continued role in health care amid increasing challenges from competing professions and third-party payers.

AJOT’s new Research Scholars Initiative (RSI) will invite occupational therapy researchers to participate as members for a 2- to 3-year term. During their term, RSI researchers will generate 1 or 2 manuscripts on the effectiveness of occupational therapy interventions. The following types of studies will be considered appropriate:

- Randomized, controlled trials (RCTs)
- Secondary analyses of large data sets for information on nonprimary outcomes, patient satisfaction, or cost-effectiveness
- Pilot RCTs with intent-to-treat (ITT) analyses
- Pilot RCTs without ITT analyses
- High-quality intervention studies (randomized or nonrandomized, controlled pretest–posttest)
- Feasibility studies (piloting intervention and testing preliminary outcomes).

The benefits of participating in the RSI include expedited publication in the journal, acknowledgment by formal letter and certificate from AOTA presented at the annual AOTA conference, publicity of manuscripts in OT Practice and AOTA 1-Minute Updates, and possible press releases for the most rigorous studies.

If you are interested in participating in the RSI or would like to learn more about this program, please contact me by e-mail at ajoteditor@aota.org. Please include a 1-page plan of your proposed research with a timeline and list of colleagues and contributors.

I am confident that if we work together for this united cause, we will be able to generate the research evidence that is direly needed for occupational therapy to become, in accordance with the Centennial Vision, a widely respected and valued profession whose services are known to positively affect society.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Sharon A. Gutman, PhD, OTR, FAOTA
AJOT Editor-in-Chief
ajoteditor@aota.org

References
