

Changing the name of *The Journal of Hospital Infection* and the consequences for its impact factor

Recent years have seen a move from referring to the term "hospital-acquired infections" or "hospital infections" to "healthcare-associated infections" (HCAI) as important infections can occur in acute hospitals as well as in other healthcare facilities, such as nursing homes, residential facilities, etc. Within its remit, *The Journal of Hospital Infection*, encourages the submission of manuscripts on all HCAI and has published on non-hospital infections and related matters in recent years.

To reflect the change in nomenclature and the broader implications of HCAI rather than purely hospital infections, The Hospital Infection Society has proposed to change the name of its Journal to *The Journal of Healthcare Infection*. However, the implication of a journal name change means that the Journal will be equivalent to an entirely new journal in terms of building up an impact factor as the current one will not be transferred.

Impact factors are a scientific attempt to grade journals in terms of the merit of their publications according to citations and their potential scientific value. Within the current category in which the *Journal of Hospital Infection* is placed, it is now the leader with an impact factor of 2.956, i.e. it exceeds that of *Infection Control and Hospital Epidemiology* and the *American Journal of Infection Control*, neither of which is proposing to change their titles, even though the former has the term "hospital" and not "healthcare" in its title and neither have the more modern concept of "infection prevention and control" in their respective titles

The impact factor is critical in terms of the Journal's ability to attract manuscripts, advertising revenue, referees, editors, and it also has significant implications for those in the academic sector. Academic departments and staff members are under pressure to publish in high impact journals as this attracts funding, and researchers in the early stages of their careers cannot afford to submit manuscripts to journals with low impact factors when other journals with a higher impact factor are available in their area of research.

A recent article by David Tempest (*Learned Publishing* 2005; 18: 57-62) explores the consequences of journal name change. The author is a senior publishing information manager with Elsevier, the publishers of *The Journal of Hospital*

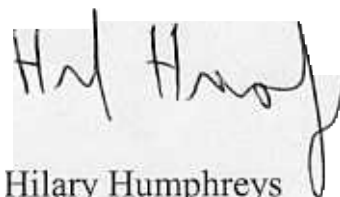
Infection. He reviewed the consequences of changing the name of a journal on impact factors, and for medical journals the mean interval to recover the impact factor was 2.62 years, but it varied from one to eight years. Interestingly, he concludes by stating that,

When staff at Elsevier have asked my advice in the past on journal title changes, I have always indicated to them that it would negatively affect the impact factor for a couple of years and that they should only change the title if really necessary. The results of this study indicate that after the change of title, a journal's impact factor is affected for longer than originally thought.

Therefore this view from our own publishers indicates that the journal title should not be changed unless really necessary.

Ultimately the question is whether it is **really necessary** to change the journal's title to *The Journal of Healthcare Infection*. Ideally, the journal's title should reflect its content, remit and be forward looking. However, *The New England Journal of Medicine* has the highest impact factor of medical journals that cover the full breadth of medicine and healthcare. The title reflects the original Boston base of its readers and subscribers but now it is a truly global journal. There has been no indication as far as one is aware, that the journal has decided to change from what could be described as a somewhat parochial title, because readers, authors and others know well that it has long outgrown its New England base.

The implications of a title change for *The Journal of Hospital Infection* are very significant, given the adverse effect on its impact factor and the consequences of this for readers, authors, editors and the publishers. The decision to change the name of the Society is sensible and progressive but the consequences of a journal name change come with a significant price. This price is too high and the journal name change should not go ahead.



Hilary Humphreys
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