



## Internet Journal of Medical Update

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### Brief Communication

#### Accuracy of references in Internet Journal of Medical Update

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**ABSTRACT:** This study was done to observe the accuracy of references in articles published in Internet Journal of Medical Update (IJMU). Sixty references were randomly selected from IJMU (Volume 5, Number 2, July 2010, Volume 4, Number 2, July 2009 and Volume 4, Number 1, January 2009). The instructions for authors of this journal were looked carefully. All the references were compared with the original for accuracy, using the following six elements: authors name; journal name as per Index Medicus; year; volume; and page numbers. References were considered incorrect if there was an error in any of these six elements. Statistical analysis was done by using frequency and percentage. Ten percent references in Internet Journal of Medical Update were inaccurate. Most common errors were author's name and title of the article. Author's names were found to be incorrect in 5.0% references while title of the article was found to be incorrect in 3.3%. Least common error was found in writing the journal name (either incorrect abbreviations or incorrect instructions or punctuation errors) in (1.7%). Inaccuracies of references are also found in the Internet Journal of Medical Update. The majority of errors in IJMU are avoidable. So, the authors, editors and the reviewers have to check for any errors seriously before publication in the journal.

**KEY WORDS:** *References; Accuracy; IJMU*

#### INTRODUCTION

The references of any type of article are significant to all the authors, reviewers, editors and readers. Inaccurate references reflect poorly on the authors and also create confusion. Inaccuracy of reference citations in the published medical literature is an ongoing problem that has been identified in a variety of international journals. References can often be traced back over several publications in which they were previously incorrectly cited. These errors when again cited by other articles not seeing the original text make the errors repetitious.

When there are errors in writing the references, there will be difficulty for readers to read the articles. Certain errors such as incorrect year, volume or page number make it particularly difficult to locate references and can be a source of frustration to the reader. Errors in the title and name of authors are important, because they detract from the credibility of the paper, the authors and the journal<sup>1</sup>. Major mistakes are the most important as they make access to the reference difficult<sup>2</sup>. Minor errors might be considered as a sign of disrespect or lack of courtesy to the author or authors, and may impact negatively on their academic records by excluding the name from the citation index<sup>3</sup>.

#### METHODOLOGY

Sixty references were randomly selected from IJMU (Volume 5, Number 2, July 2010, Volume 4,

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Number 2, July 2009 and Volume 4, Number 1, January 2009). The instructions for authors of this journal were looked at carefully. References were examined in details and compared them with the original for accuracy, using the following six elements: authors; including spelling, initials, order and number; title, including spelling and punctuation; journal name, including use of correct abbreviation as listed in Index Medicus; year; volume; and page numbers, including first and last page numbers. Citations were considered incorrect if there was an error in any of these six elements. Errors within each element were subdivided into categories according to the types of error found. References not cited from indexed journals were excluded. Statistical analysis was done by using frequency and percentage.

### RESULTS

There were 10.0% references in Internet Journal of Medical Update which was found to be incorrect. Most common errors were author's name and title of the article. Author's names were found to be incorrect in 5.0% references while title of the article was incorrect in 3.3% (Table 1). Least common errors in citing references were journal name (either incorrect abbreviations or incorrect

instruction or punctuation errors) in 1.7%. Single error was found in 8.3% of references whereas multiple errors were found in 1.7%. Some of the examples of errors in citing the references are given in Table 2.

**Table: 1. Types of errors in references in IJMU**

Elements/ Errors	Number (%)
Author's name	3 (5.0%)
Title of the article	2 (3.3%)
Journal Name	1 (1.7%)
Year	*
Volume number	-
Page number	-
<b>Total errors</b>	<b>6 (10.0%)</b>

*\*indicates that there was error in that component but it is multiple error and is counted in other element.*

**Table: 2. Examples of errors in writing the references in IJMU**

Incorrect References	Correct References (Corrections are highlighted as bold typed)
<b>Author's name</b>	
Jain U, Verma IC. Prevalence of fragile X (A) syndrome in mentally retarded children at a genetics referral centre in Delhi, India. <i>Indian J Med Res.</i> 2008 Jul;108:12-6.	Jain U, Verma IC, <b>Kapoor AK.</b> Prevalence of fragile X (A) syndrome in mentally retarded children at a genetics referral centre in Delhi, India. <i>Indian J Med Res.</i> 1998 Jul;108:12-6.
Walchle R, Stewart H, Terrill JG. An automatic x-ray-size limiting system. <i>Radiology.</i> 1967 Jul;89:105-9.	Walchle R, Stewart H, Terrill JG <b>Jr.</b> An automatic x-ray-size limiting system. <i>Radiology.</i> 1967 Jul;89(1):105-9.
<b>Paper's title</b>	
Coleman DA, Blair WF, Shurr D. Resection of the radial head for fracture of the radial head. <i>J Bone Joint Surg Am.</i> 1987 Mar; 69(3): 385-92.	Coleman DA, Blair WF, Shurr D. Resection of the radial head for fracture of the radial head. <b>Long-term follow-up of seventeen cases.</b> <i>J Bone Joint Surg Am.</i> 1987 Mar;69(3):385-92.
<b>Title of the journal</b>	
Sahay M, Singh MV. Time factor as a prognostic indicator on the BGT. <i>Journal of Clinical Psychology.</i> 1975;31(4):720-2.	Sahay M, Singh MV. Time factor as a prognostic indicator on the Bender-Gestalt test. <b>J Clin Psychol.</b> 1975;31(4):720-2.

### DISCUSSION

It is generally written in instruction for authors of all journals that the accuracy of references is the sole responsibility of the authors. Errors in any one

of these six elements (authors name including spelling, initials, order and number; title, including spelling and punctuation; journal name, including use of correct abbreviation as listed in Index Medicus; year; volume; and page numbers,

including first and last page numbers) of the references makes the readers and other authors repeat the same mistakes if they are not cited from the original article. Some errors such as title of the article, name of the authors and the name of the journal, make it difficult for the article to be located easily. Furthermore, the originality by whom the articles are written or in which journal the article is published will be lost.

Correct references give credit to the original researchers and allow readers to easily retrieve cited articles. It helps the readers to know about the particular topic on a wider range. Inaccuracy of reference citation in the published medical literature is an ongoing problem that has been identified in a variety of specialist medical journals<sup>4</sup>. It reflects poorly on the authors and shows that the author has not consulted the original text. In fact, the authors might have copied the references from other reference of the articles.

A recent study done on accuracy of references on Australasian Medical Journal revealed that 14.0% of references were incorrect<sup>5</sup>. An otolaryngology/head and neck surgery citation error rate of 37.5% was seen in a study done by Fenton et al<sup>3</sup> which is higher than our study. Adhikari<sup>1</sup> revealed that 11.6% references in Nepal Medical College Journal, 11.1% references in Journal of Nepal Medical Association and 23.3% references in Kathmandu University Medical Journal were inaccurate<sup>1</sup>. Most common errors in all three journals quoted by Adhikari<sup>1</sup> include author's name which is similar to our study.

Our recent study regarding accuracy of references in Internet Journal of Medical Update revealed a low percentage (10.0%) of error in writing the references in the article. This is good percentage of accuracies of this journal compared to rates calculated for other medical specialities, including anaesthetics (32-41%), dentistry (37%), general surgery (48%), and general medicine (24%)<sup>6,7</sup>. Goldberg et al study found an error rate of 27.5% in a random sample citation from three major American emergency medicine journals<sup>8</sup>.

Although most journals give the responsibility for accuracy of references to authors, some journals also have provision of checking the references by the editor or reviewer. In author's point of view, there is also the responsibility of editors and peer reviewers. The accuracy of the references can be improved a lot if the authors directly refer to the original article. Other ways to improve the

accuracy of references are: checking the references by editor or reviewer, page proof sent to authors for final correction of the articles before publication, limiting the number of references and proper instruction for authors on references by giving examples or by appointing a reference editor who only looks after the references and corrects them. If these measures are adopted then we hope the inaccuracies in quoting references will be decreased dramatically.

## CONCLUSION

Inaccuracies of references are also found in the Internet Journal of Medical Update. The majority of errors in IJMU are avoidable. So, the authors, editors and the reviewers have to check for any errors seriously before publication in the journal.

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