

The Korean Journal of Internal Medicine's long road to being listed in the Science Citation Index Expanded

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Introduction

On February 7, 2014, *The Korean Journal of Internal Medicine (KJIM)* received a letter from Thomson Reuters indicating its acceptance into the Science Citation Index Expanded (SCIE) list of journals. It has been 28 years since the founding of the *KJIM*, and 7 years since preparations for its registration into the SCIE began in earnest. Herein, I have summarized the evolution process of the *KJIM* over the course of these preparations, in the hope that it will be of some help to other associations looking at developing journals with a global reach.

History of the Korean Journal of Internal Medicine

The first issue of the *KJIM* was published in January 1986. At the time, it was hard to even imagine writing articles in English. Nevertheless, the Korean Association of Internal Medicine (KAIM) seemed quite enlightened and open to the idea; many of its board members had an enterprising spirit. Despite its ambitious beginnings, the *KJIM* failed to grow further and could barely keep itself in existence for over 20 years. As Korean journals began to be listed on the SCIE one after another, fewer articles were being submitted to the *KJIM*. There was growing concern among the editorial board members of the *KJIM* that the journal might not be able to be maintained without extreme measures as long as the present situation continued to persist. This led the *KJIM* to establish specific plans to overcome this crisis by gaining entry into the SCIE.

Preparations for Indexing the Korean Journal of Internal Medicine in the SCIE

We had been planning to have the *KJIM* listed on the SCIE since 2007. The executive branch, including the Chairman of the KAIM, had made plans to have the journal listed on the SCIE as one of the ways to develop the association. It spared no effort toward that end, by providing not only institutional support, but also financial support. There was also an attempt to change the existing structure of the editorial board of the KAIM. Separate editorial boards for Korean and

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English submissions to the *KJIM* were established, and a task force charged with the registration of the journal into the SCIE was organized. We also reorganized the contribution rules and website of the *KJIM*, and improved its peer review system. Above all, we made a concerted effort to increase the number of editorial board members and pursue globalization.

The First Challenge toward Gaining Entry into the SCIE

The first submission to the SCIE for registration was sent in July 2009 after two years of preparations. At the time, the impact factor (IF) of the *KJIM* was 0.41, and the journal was ranked 111th out of 133 journals of internal medicine listed on the Web of Science. The result was disappointing; we received a rejection letter from Thomson Reuters in September 2010, a year after submission, stating that the rejection was due to the low IF of the *KJIM*. However, learning that the *KJIM* would at least be maintained in the Biosis Previews and Biological Abstracts brought some relief, as it implied that the journal could potentially be listed once we increased its IF.

Changes to the Korean Journal of Internal Medicine after the Failure of Its First Attempt to be Listed

A key task of the editorial board after failure to gain entry into the SCIE was to increase the journal's IF. Thus, strategies and specific goals were outlined.

First, we decided to increase the frequency of publication. The KAIM began to encourage its members to submit articles and contribute towards research funds in order to increase the frequency of publication, from a quarterly basis to a monthly one. The KAIM also revised the rules regarding research support or funding and thesis submission standards for medical specialist examination qualifications. Those who published their original articles in the *KJIM* were qualified to receive research funds and have their specialist exam qualifications approved. The editorial board selected outstanding articles that had been originally written in Korean, and encouraged the authors to translate the articles into English, exempting them from costs concerning translation, proofreading, publication, and supplementation. The editorial board members were also strongly encouraged to make submissions to the *KJIM*. As a result, the number of original articles gradually increased. Since 2011, the journal was able to be published every other month.

Second, we attempted to diversify the structure of the journal, as, based on our self-evaluations, its previous layout (consisting only of original articles and case reports) had failed to

attract readers' interest. We created a diverse program, by adding sections for reviews, editorials, letters to the editors, images of interest, and guidelines, aside from original articles and case reports, in order to approach readers as a more interesting journal.

Third, we strived to secure excellent review articles. The results of an investigation we performed on IFs of articles published in 2010 and 2011 in different fields revealed that the average IF of a review article was 6.92, indicating that it was definitely higher than that of an original article (1.91) or a case report (0.61). First, we received recommendations from editorial board members regarding outstanding researchers who were able to submit review articles to the journal. We then drew up a list of researchers, and sent each one a letter of request for submissions. However, it was difficult to receive review articles from researchers who already had their hands full, and only 40% of those we approached agreed to make a submission. Nevertheless, we made every possible effort to receive even one more review article, through constantly sending out letters of request.

Fourth, we tried to improve accessibility to the *KJIM* for readers. We made a list of indexing organizations such as Thomson Reuters, Scopus, and Medline, and contacted these organizations by sending the relevant letters/correspondences. Above all, the journal's IF increased flexibly, as full-text articles published in the journal were appearing on Pubmed and Pubmed Central.

Fifth, we sought to encourage our members and editorial board members to increase their use of citations from the *KJIM*. We first sent frequent e-mails to members about the journal's increased IF and letters of appreciation for citing articles published in the *KJIM*. We drew up a list of SCI citations from articles by the editorial board members published in the *KJIM*, and regularly monitored its status. In the process, the editorial board members showed increasing interest in the *KJIM*. Competent editorial board members also published review articles in the *KJIM* and made citations, contributing significantly to the increase in the journal's IF. We also paid due attention to the management of our members by regularly sending letters of appreciation to those who cited the *KJIM*.

Improvements in the Impact Factor of the Korean Journal of Internal Medicine

Along with human-powered efforts to increase the IF, we also regularly tracked the IF of the *KJIM*. The results showed that the journal's averaged IF was 0.36 from 2000 to 2008. It increased by at least 1.0 since then to 0.41 in 2009, 0.64 in 2010, and 1.1 in 2011. The average IF was 1.3 in 2012. Considering the fact that articles in other countries cited the *KJIM* more

than did those in Korea, and that those citing the *KJIM* were often from leading global organizations and world-class journals, we were able to see that the *KJIM* had developed into a world-renowned journal.

Evolution of the Korean Journal of Internal Medicine

With the increase in its IF, the *KJIM* implemented new changes within its format, incorporating a “cover page,” sections on characters, the abstract format, and the key message of original articles, and modified table and figure formats to be more readable and appear more globalized and sophisticated. We also introduced English language editing services. The Website displayed the main contents of original articles on a real-time basis, and attracted readers’ attention with the use of five key titles: “Ahead of print,” “Current issue,” “Archive,” “Most read,” and “Most cited.” In particular, all the issues of the *KJIM*, from the first to the latest, were converted into PDF files and uploaded onto the Website for readers to have better access to the original texts. In conclusion, throughout the process of preparing the *KJIM* for acceptance into the SCIE, we made improvements to English proofreading, article proofreading, and publishing procedures, as well as to the journal’s Website. The journal itself was reborn as a global journal through the renewal of its layout and structure.

There was a heated discussion over the title of the journal and an appropriate publisher until the very end. Some argued that the title “*the Korean Journal of Internal Medicine*” was too old fashioned, did not reflect current trends, and thus needed to be changed. However, we decided to keep the title, as it was a leading journal for internal medicine representing Korea. To select a publisher, we considered several world-renowned publishers that had prior experience with registration into the SCIE. However, we concluded that there would be no significant benefit from choosing a foreign publisher since the *KJIM* was already at the global level in many respects, and decided on a Korean publisher.

The Second Challenge toward Gaining Entry into the SCIE

After 3 years of preparations, the editorial board members had now gained some confidence. The journal’s IF had tripled from 0.4 to 1.3 by then, and the *KJIM* had proven its competitive edge over other SCIE journals published in Korea. With the stabilization of journal publication, website, and publishing processes, we planned to take on the second challenge toward gaining acceptance into the SCIE.

First, we improved the strengths and remedied the weak-

nesses of the *KJIM* regarding the four criteria for journal selection provided by Thomson Reuters: journal publishing standards, editorial content, international diversity, and citation analysis. Unlike the first time, we decided on a specific point in time by which we hoped to be listed on the index: September 2013. We reviewed the journals to be evaluated—the September and November 2013 issues, and January 2014 issue—and planned on an electronic submission.

Unique Distinguishing Features of the Korean Journal of Internal Medicine

Our primary concern with making an electronic submission was how to describe the unique features that distinguished the *KJIM* from other journals. We came up with an outline by summarizing the features into a few points, and decided to emphasize the following. First, the *KJIM* was known for its long history as being a leading journal of internal medicine representing Korea. Second, it was organized to be highly readable in its communication of the extensive body of knowledge in internal medicine. Third, it had shown continuous growth in both quantity and quality. Fourth, the low IFs of citations, which had been pointed out in the submission 3 years ago, had increased consistently over the previous 3 years. We summarized all the efforts made by the *KJIM* in the last 3 years into six concise points, as shown below.

First, the *KJIM* merits coverage in Web of Science. *KJIM* publishes highly qualified and relevant scientific articles in a timely manner that can benefit the readers and enrich the scientific database. The *KJIM* is now among the top 5 Korean journals in impact factor rankings. Furthermore, the *KJIM* is cited more by international researchers than Korean researchers, indicating that the content of the journal is now valued at the international level.

Second, the *KJIM* fully satisfies basic publishing standards. Timeliness is one of the top priorities of the *KJIM*, and the journal maintains a strict peer-review process and includes funding acknowledgement. Every article is subjected to an English language editing process to ensure efficient transfer of knowledge and is provided free of charge to the authors. The *KJIM* follows international editorial conventions, and our editorial advisory board members and contributing authors include highly recognized scholars from all over the world.

Third, the *KJIM* has a convenient electronic submission system and fast publication process. Our electronic submission system is world’s convenient process all accessed by internet. Therefore, the journal’s process of publication is generally the fastest. Median turnaround time needed to publish—considering all submissions including peer reviews, revisions, production, and distribution—is within 6 months.

Fourth, the *KJIM* gives readers throughout the world free and easy access to articles. The *KJIM* is an Open Access journal. The *KJIM* provides free, easy access to articles for readers throughout the world. The *KJIM* is listed in PubMed, PubMed Central, SCOPUS, EMBASE, CAS, KoreaMed, Synapse, and CrossRef. Readers can access free full-text archives of the *KJIM* via PubMed Central and the *KJIM* homepage (<http://www.kjim.org>).

Fifth, the *KJIM* has been selected as an outstanding journal by the Korean government. The *KJIM* has been chosen as an outstanding international journal by the Korean Federation of Science and Technology Societies, and is currently being funded by the Korean government. Therefore, it is not surprising that the *KJIM* continues to maintain a high standard of quality and its official status, and is able to provide high quality content to subscribers at no financial costs.

Sixth, the *KJIM* developed a diverse array of contents to satisfy readers' medical needs. The editorial board of the *KJIM* developed six sections to get readers' interest. Among them are review articles dealing with hot issues in internal medicine, and editorials focusing on controversial issues. Each original article provides a "Key Message" to readers. Informative and educational cases are selected as case reports or images of interest. Thus, the *KJIM* is becoming a more interesting and popular journal in the field of internal medicine. After thorough evaluation of the *KJIM*, our editorial board decided to resubmit the *KJIM* for evaluation by Thomson Reuters. We are proud to publish a highly qualified journal, and we hope to get a positive response from the editorial team at Thomson Reuters.

The second submission for the *KJIM* to be listed in the SCIE was sent in August 2013 after a series of preparation processes.

It was done in the form of an electronic submission. We waited around for a response from Thomson Reuters, as we could find no information or schedule regarding the progress of our submission. Then, 6 months after our submission, we sent a follow-up letter titled "Journal Evaluation Status Request" to check on whether the *KJIM* would be listed. Three days later, we received a letter from Thomson Reuters confirming that the *KJIM* would be listed on the SCIE.

Conclusion

There were many rumors regarding the *KJIM*'s SCIE submission, all of which were negative. Some stated that there was no chance of the journal being listed on the index if its title included "Korea." Others pointed out that it would stand a better chance if a global publisher had been used, that it was not likely to be accepted within 5 years once the journal was rejected, and that the journal's impact factor had to be a "2" at least. However, by succeeding in being listed on the SCIE, the *KJIM* proved these rumors to be inaccurate. This progress was made in the process of creating a high-quality journal, matching the process of increasing the journal's impact factor. Moreover, it was possible thanks to the KAIM's vision and support, along with the will of the editorial board executives and members. The *KJIM* is finally listed on the SCIE, 28 years since its founding and 7 years since preparations for it to be listed were made. It has been a long, hard-fought journey.

Conflict of Interest

No potential conflict of interest relevant to this article was reported.