

Editorial

Medline Bias: Update*

There were 754 million Medline searches in the year 2005. Not one of those searches found a single article from the *Journal of Orthomolecular Medicine*. There is a growing appreciation in the scientific community that the *Journal* is being deliberately censored by the U.S. National Library of Medicine (NLM). Since 1989, *JOM* has been rejected for Medline indexing five times.

This is the decision of a journal review committee preselected by NLM. When we have tried to clarify just what it is that Medline feels is lacking, we have not received a specific answer. The score sheet that we do get is vague, and offers no itemization of objectives for improvement. We are told that, even though our score was not high enough for indexing, we can resubmit and be scored again. Although this has an appearance of open-mindedness, it is a convenient cover for institutional bias. By not telling *JOM* what specific objections it has, Medline assures that *JOM* will never quite get it. It is reminiscent of an old-time small-town beauty contest: if the contest judges don't like the mayor, his daughter is not going to get a very high score no matter what outfit she wears or what song she sings. As Dr. Steve Hickey says, if the prosecution picks the jury, the verdict is a foregone conclusion.

We have carried on what has become a fairly extensive correspondence with NLM as represented by Chief of the Bibliographic Services Division and Medline Executive Editor, Sheldon Kotzin. In the interest of identifying and correcting deficiencies, we have requested a laundry list of exactly what changes *JOM* needs to make to gain a score high enough for indexing. Mr. Kotzin has not provided the answer. Instead, he has repeatedly directed us to Medline's general requisites for indexing a journal (<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/pubs/factsheets/jsel.html>).

Of the eight published "Critical Elements" for journal selection, it would appear that the tip-off phrases may be these: Medline says it indexes journals having "articles predominantly on core biomedical subjects"; that "scientific merit of a journal's content is the primary consideration"; and that they are looking for external peer review.

It is possible, but unconfirmed, that NLM thinks that the *Journal of Orthomolecular Medicine* lacks external peer review. It would be a simple matter for them to simply say so, but they never have. There may be a reason: if they flag that issue, then they would have to admit us. In addition to its Editorial Review Board, *JOM* does indeed use external reviewers. I therefore think the real deal-breakers are these: First, *JOM* is a journal that discusses orthomolecular medicine, a field NLM probably considers to be far removed from "core biomedical subjects." And, as "scientific merit of a journal's content is the primary consideration," we must conclude that, in the eyes of the US National Library of Medicine, *JOM* lacks scientific merit.

Incidentally, item number 4, "Production Quality," does not seem to be an obstacle for *JOM*; we received a 4 out of a possible 5 in this category. This is quite significant, compared with zeroes, ones and twos in all other categories.

The idea that the world's most comprehensive medical library refuses to index a journal, now entering its fortieth year of publication, is, well, you can fill in your own blank. It increasingly looks as if the point of contention is not the singer, but the song itself.

Incidentally, Medline now indexes *Consumer Reports* magazine.

—Andrew W. Saul, Assistant Editor

*See Saul, AW: Medline Bias. *J Orthomol Med*, 2005; 21(1): 10-16.