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Setting the Record Straight on MEDLINE, PubMed, and PMC

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We read this article with interest. We are pleased to see more attention being given to the issues surrounding questionable publishing practices. However, the authors have inaccurately described how journals are selected for inclusion in PubMed Central (PMC) and incorrectly characterized certain journals as being indexed in PubMed, a service of the National Library of Medicine (NLM), part of the U.S. National Institutes of Health.

PubMed is comprised of citations from journals selected for indexing in MEDLINE (NLM’s bibliographic database), citations from journals selected for archiving in PMC (NLM’s full-text database), and citations for individual articles that are deposited in PMC by funded authors, in compliance with the public access policies of the NIH or other collaborating funders (1,2). Articles deposited in support of public access policies ensure that funded, peer-reviewed research is both preserved and publicly accessible.
The most accurate way to determine a journal’s status in the NLM collection is by searching the NLM Catalog (3) or alternative catalog interface, LocatorPlus (4). Each journal record indicates whether it is currently indexed for MEDLINE, archived in PMC, or is referenced because an individual article has been included in PMC/PubMed in support of a public access policy.

At present, MEDLINE comprises 92% of the more than 28 million citations in PubMed. As Yan and colleagues note, journals that apply to be indexed in MEDLINE undergo a scientific and editorial evaluation by NLM’s Literature Selection Technical Review Committee (5). Likewise, journals that apply to be archived in PMC undergo a rigorous evaluation process involving expert consultants. This evaluation process focuses on the scientific rigor of the articles as well as journal policies, language clarity, and other elements that contribute to the objectivity and credibility of the content (6).

NLM may also reevaluate journals that are in PubMed to verify that they continue to meet our standards; journals that fail to do so are discontinued, though citations from the period that the journal was included remain discoverable in PubMed (7). NLM also expects publishers of MEDLINE and PMC journals to adhere to established scholarly publishing guidelines and best practices (8).

Again, we thank the authors for their work on this important topic and hope that our comments help to clarify how journals are included in NLM’s literature databases.

References
Conflict of Interest:
The authors are employed by the National Library of Medicine (NLM), the producer of the MEDLINE database, PubMed, and PubMed Central. This work was supported by the Intramural Research Program of the National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health.