

## Comments on the Readership Survey Concerning Bi-Monthly Publication

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**INTRODUCTION:** A readership survey was posted in our monthly newsletter, "Ever Upward", and sent via email to members of the Aerospace Medical Association and to authors and reviewers of the journal, *Aerospace Medicine and Human Performance*. The reason for the survey concerned whether to publish 6 times (or perhaps 7) per year instead of 12. There were 403 respondents. Of those who responded, 30% said bimonthly publishing would affect whether they submitted to a journal; 70% said it would not impact their decision. Less than 4% strongly disapproved and 8% disapproved of moving to a bimonthly publication. While 67% were in favor and 20% didn't care one way or the other. There were many comments and some of those are addressed in the summary.

**KEYWORDS:** reader survey, bi-monthly publishing, impact factor.

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This is going to sound a bit unscientific, and it is: I do not know how many individuals were invited to take the readership survey regarding bi-monthly publication. I know it was printed in the newsletter first and garnered about 10 responses.\* I know that a blast email was sent to 1625 members (those members who have not opted out of receiving blast emails) and was opened by 589 of them. And then it was sent to all authors and reviewers active in the Editorial Manager system, but that system (used by the Editor's office) does not show how many emails were sent or the open rate, so that is where I am stuck. All I know for sure is that somewhere north of 2000 emails were sent and I have 403 responses. So, this analysis is simply based on "of those who responded..."

...70% are members; ...60% prefer emails as the means of communication; ...10% have never read the journal online; and ...nearly 50% still prefer the print journal. It is heartening to know that nearly 50% have read or looked through all of the last four issues, whereas only 10% didn't read any of them. While 70% do not read the online newsletter, at least some of them have asked to receive it.

About 35% of those who responded review for our journal and nearly 60% review for other journals. Nearly 80% are

researchers or authors, but 60% have not published in our journal in the last 5 yr.

The real reason for the survey concerned whether to publish 6 times (or perhaps 7) per year instead of 12. Of those who responded, 30% said bi-monthly publishing would affect whether they submitted to a journal; 70% said it would not impact their decision. Less than 4% strongly disapproved and 8% disapproved of moving to a bi-monthly publication, while 67% were in favor and a resounding 20% didn't care one way or the other.

There was a 45/65 split on publishing online ahead of print—45% said it would affect their submission; 65% said it wouldn't. Neither answer implies that this would be a bad thing, just that it wouldn't sway the author's decision about where to publish.

Looking at the demographics, the main takeaway is that older members who have advanced degrees and make the most money answer surveys. [Over 50% were over 55 yr of age; 65% had a household income over \$100,000. Less than 15% had a masters or other degree listed as their highest. Most were Ph.D.s (41%), followed by M.D.s (37%).]

It was the comment section that really got me thinking! Some comments called for specific answers.

\*Later responses revealed that almost no one reads the newsletter or even knows that it is available to the public online for free every month and that it is announced on social media (Facebook and Twitter) as soon as it is available and an email goes to all members who have not opted out of receiving Association emails (!) every month announcing its availability.

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Of the 84 comments, 19 were “no comment,” leaving 65 real comments. Of those, 4 were about the newsletter and 6 were in left field (meeting, etc.), leaving 55 that were actually journal related:

- 16 mentioned bi-monthly as good; 10 as bad. For example:
  - *“I think this is a great idea. I think research publication in general had slowed down to do lengthy studies and decreased research funding, so I think doing a bimonthly publication would make for a much better product.”*
  - *“A bimonthly publication would make the selection process more competitive, thus leading to better fine tuning of researches as well.”*
  - *“Since aerospace medicine is a kind of minor field in medical science, monthly publication would be better for maintaining the volume of research.”*
- 15 had serious quality concerns; but others were complimentary.
  - *“Keep on going for scientific supported specific expertise, that is the strength of this journal.”*
  - *“The scope of this journal is unique and definitely has a place in the scientific literature.”*
- 7 mentioned Impact Factor—does changing frequency actually help or hurt? Do we have any evidence to back up this idea?
- 5 had concerns regarding reviewing.
- 4 want it to be more eco-friendly and felt that bi-monthly would be better for the environment.
- 3 had submission problems.
- 2 commented on open access.
- 2 want more online; social media, etc.
- 1 had publication time concerns.

About 45% of the comments were either noncomments (20%) or about something other than the journal questionnaire itself—like the newsletter, the annual meeting, the association, or personal messages or comments. One person thinks the Journal Management is doing a lousy job and needs to change (!). Guess what? I am still here for a few more years! Others asked me direct questions or made direct comments to me which shows that we are small enough to know who’s sending the survey! What got me was the astounding number who didn’t even realize we had a newsletter!

There were very thoughtful comments about whether going to a bi-monthly publication would help or hurt our impact factor. But be assured—we are not bound to publish a certain number of pages or articles per month and we **do not** publish articles to fill pages. Also, we are not solely driven by a desire to increase our impact factor—which in some ways is a flawed metric. The question here is: Is a manuscript of high quality and useful to our readers? That is our main motivation.

It was disconcerting to read the number of comments about the poor quality of our journal. I hope that isn’t true. We are open to suggestions about improvement.

There were disappointed reviewers who saw articles they had rejected ultimately being published. The problem with any peer review system is that it takes more than one reviewer to decide what to publish. What happens in some cases is

that we get one reviewer who says, “Reject this paper,” and the second reviewer says, “Accept with major (or minor) revisions.” What to do? Often a third reviewer is brought in and the editor then makes the decision—hence the sometimes very long time between submission and acceptance. None of this is simple. And by the very nature of this you can see that we bend over backward to try and be fair and accept a paper with merit.

There were some familiar themes as well: nonspace folks think the journal is too spacey, nonmilitary folks think it is too military-oriented. The clinical folks want more clinical stuff, but they do not write articles for us.

Some think we should publish online only and print on demand. We are actually heading in that direction, but we are not quite there yet (especially since nearly 50% still prefer to read the printed journal!). Others think we have plenty of money to publish the journal 12 times a year (they obviously don’t sit at the Council meetings!). But money alone would not be the motivation to move to bi-monthly.

There were some good ideas, too. We can implement a blast email with the Table of Contents and news about the current issue of the journal to members (who have not opted out of receiving blast emails), although you can also sign up to receive Issue Alerts from Ingenta. One person suggested emailing the full journal like UHMS does, but we simply can’t do this: we use a different interface from UHMS—theirs is page-turn, but not searchable, which ours is.

Some want more Social Media (webinars, Facebook live, podcasts, Zoom, infographics, Twitter threads). This is a difficult request and one that needs more input. What does tweeting accomplish? We already tweet about the newsletter and new posts to the Association Facebook page, but what is gained by a journal tweeting? What would a journal Facebook page look like? Who would manage these? The journal has a Linked-In page, but what exactly is that for? These things take time and commitment.

We could begin e-publishing ahead of print—we sort of do this now, depending on how long it takes to check the issue and get it posted on Ingenta—we aim for 2 wk prior to the mail date. We could choose certain articles to highlight or make all articles available when ready ahead of the publication date. Food for thought.

One person suggested we solicit special supplements. We have worked with many organizations over the years to publish special supplements. These are costly (~\$265 per finished page) and need funding, usually through a grant or as part of the mission itself. They require a separate editor, a peer review process, and management. If anyone has such a project, please let us know! We would be happy to look at it.

There were suggestions to start mentorship and a student paper section. These are interesting ideas. We have used the “You’re the Flight Surgeon” as a learning tool and, many years ago, we had a column on “Cases from the Aerospace Medicine Residents Teaching File.” We have some information about how to submit a manuscript on our website (did you know that the journal has its own web pages within the AsMA website?).

Again, this would take someone to shepherd it. But it is worth pursuing.

There is still confusion between journal and abstract submission by a couple of folks. These are two separate things that just happen to be handled by the same department. The deadline for abstracts is based on many factors, including that the review is held in conjunction with the Fall Council meeting so that folks only have to travel once, plus the need to review, schedule, and publish ahead of the annual meeting, while allowing time for the journal to reach international members, as well as the need to put in for travel. We have talked about going to online remote review, but so far the reviewers have preferred to do the face-to-face reviewing. Archaic maybe, but the timeline works for 99%. We enjoy being together, especially now after so much social distancing.

The deadline for publishing in the journal is 2 mo prior to the cover date, so the deadline for September is July. The manuscripts for any issue are published as soon as possible once the review is complete and the manuscript has been accepted. It is then tooled for style and reference checking,

edited by the journal department staff, typeset, proofread and corrected, and then published—normally within 2 mo of acceptance.

Folks complained about clunky interfaces, inability to search, and how we are not indexed online (which we are—in PubMed). Some complained that Editorial Manager is hard to use. Maybe we need to create a tutorial on how to use theses interfaces. But here I have to go back to the fact that we are a small community. You can always call the journal office at 703-739-2240 x103 for help with Editorial Manager. And you can call me or Rachel for any other problems at x101 and x102.

In the end, there was not a strong push back to publishing bi-monthly so long as it is not solely profit driven and the intent is to improve quality (not necessarily impact factor). Many readers still prefer print but want to be notified by email. Ultimately the decision will rest with the Editorial Board and the AsMA Council, both of which will meet in October. It's always good to take the pulse of our readers and we thank them for their thoughtful responses.