

# Development of open access medical journals in Russia: encountered problems and the example of the *Saratov Journal of Medical Scientific Research*

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**Abstract** The article highlights the main problems and perspectives of launching open access medical journals in Russia, using *The Saratov Journal of Medical Scientific Research* as an example. Launching the journal's open access website is viewed as a major achievement, enabling smooth communication and coordination of the editorial work. Insufficient English language skills among authors and editors are the main problem hampering international recognition of Russian scholarly journals.

**Keywords** Periodicals as topic; biomedicine; Russia; science editing.

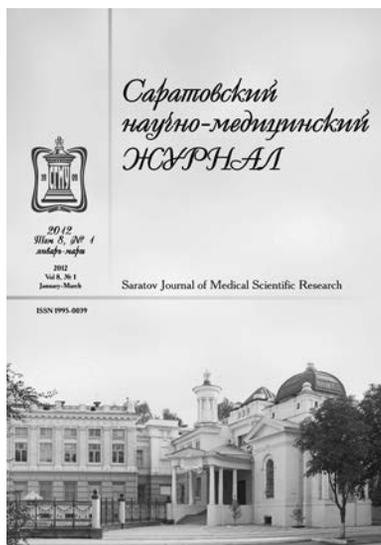
Most Russian scholarly journals remain largely unknown to the global scientific community, causing isolation of information flows in Russia. Despite the wide availability of digital translators, the language barrier and insufficient

English language skills among Russian authors and editors are still the main reasons limiting the global influence of their scientific articles. They also prevent the publication of these articles in the most prestigious English-language journals. To address this, some Russian journals have launched English-language versions supported by international publishing companies such as Springer. However, bilingual journals cover only a small part of medical research in Russia.

Several problems are common to most Russian biomedical journals: i) lack of electronic full-texts of articles, ii) poor quality of journal websites, iii) inefficient peer review, iv) lack of open access, v) lack of funds to run the journals (mainly due to the so-called economic self-sufficiency policy) and vi) incorrect English language editing.

Importantly, to obtain a scientific degree and academic position, Russian authors have to publish articles in the

journals approved by the Higher Attestation Commission of Russia (VAK). Once local journals achieve listing by the Commission, their further development is often abandoned, with no further attempts to improve international visibility and indexing and archiving prospects.



*Saratov Journal of Medical Scientific Research* (SJMSR) was launched in 2002. For a long while, the journal was produced only in print, with a circulation of only 500 copies, and thus remained largely unknown to the medical community. In 2009, a new set of editorial aims was adopted: i) to create an open access electronic version of the journal, ii) to print limited copies of the journal primarily for Russian academic libraries, the Saratov State Medical University and individual subscribers, iii) to prioritise publication of articles by distinguished foreign authors, eminent Russian scientists and young specialists.

It was also decided to benefit manuscripts with high reviewer scores by publishing them free of charge. To cover some costs of the editorial work, the journal started to charge publication fees for accepted manuscripts, funded by the authors' institutions or research funds. The share of these articles is about 30%.

At the same time, the editors of the journal modernised its format, launched a website ([www.ssmj.ru](http://www.ssmj.ru)) and improved the editorial workflow. All published articles are now posted on the website for open access. Particular attention was paid to the quality of the website's English page. As a result, the journal was accepted for indexing by Ulrich's International Periodicals Directory, Index Copernicus, Directory of Open Access Journals, Open J-Gate, Google Scholar, Chemical Abstracts Service, EBSCO, and more than 50 international scientific and medical websites provide links to the journal's website. In 2010, online processing of submissions in both Russian and English languages started.

These changes in the editorial policy resulted in an increase in the citation rate in the Russian Science Citation Index, from just 4 in December 2008 to 143 in March 2012. The journal reached the level of 4.87 score by Index Copernicus.

These improved scientific rankings have led to increased submissions (from 131 in 2008 to 349 in 2011) and a higher acceptance rate (now around 35%). More than 100,000

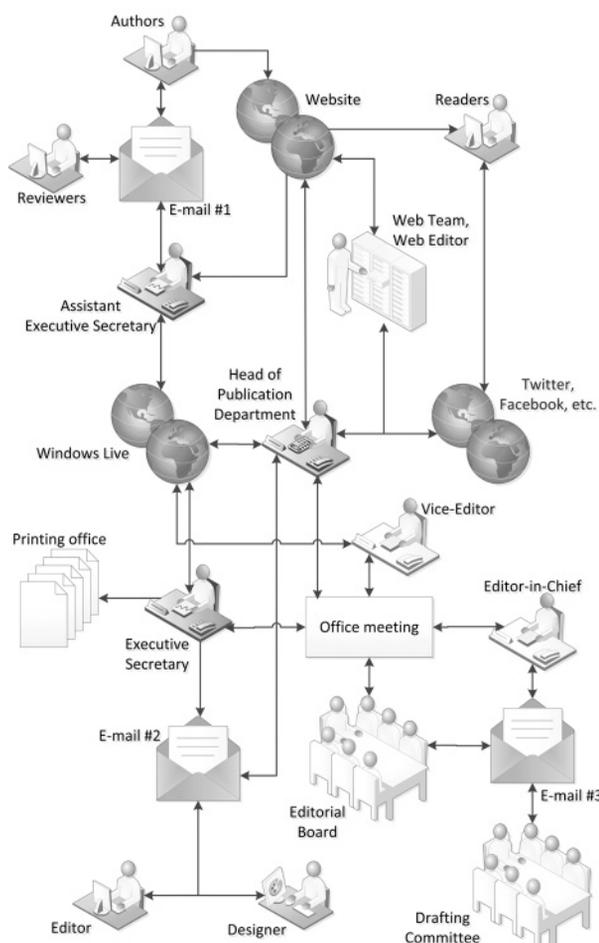
visitors from 155 countries have visited the journal's website since 2009: mostly from Russia, but also from Ukraine, the US and elsewhere.

In 2009, the editorial office implemented electronic document management, as well as starting to use Twitter, Facebook, ResearchGate and SciPeople networking resources for the distribution of information to the readership.

Figure 1 depicts the current editorial workflow. The main medium for communication between the authors, editorial staff and readers is now the journal's website. Regular in-person meetings are required only to address strategic issues.

The editorial web team works on indexing the journal's website in search engines. The main focus is on Google and Yandex. Search engines are the source of 66% of all visitors.

*Saratov Journal of Medical Scientific Research* is one of the fastest growing open access medical journals in Russia. Over the past three years the journal has attracted many new readers from Russia and abroad. The main problem to overcome remains the language barrier. It is planned to create a fully English version of our journal, to increase funding and to improve the quality of the peer review and accepted articles.



**Figure 1. Editorial work of the publication department of *Saratov Journal of Medical Scientific Research*.**

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