

The unforeseen impact of meeting abstracts on cancer research

The dissemination of scientific information usually occurs through peer-reviewed journals. Nevertheless, scientific conferences have shown to be an instance for researchers to communicate their results, obtaining immediate feedback on their findings. Yet, some researchers disregard the information presented at these conferences simply because it has not gone through a peer review process [1]. Therefore, I decided to assess the impact of meeting abstracts indexed by the Web of Science database from 2000 to 2010 that were grouped by their topic ‘cancer’.

A total of 82 541 meeting abstracts were published on indexed journals of which 7.7% had been cited at least once in their lifetime. The three most cited meeting abstracts until May 2011 are summarized in Table 1. As the Table 1 shows, the most cited meeting abstract was published on *Annals of Oncology* <5 years ago and it already has been cited by articles and reviews published on journals such as *Nature* (including *Nature Reviews Immunology*, *Nature Medicine* and *Nature Immunology*) and several *PLoS* journals. In perspective, only 18 articles published in 2006 in this field had a number of citations higher than the one obtained by this meeting abstract. Next was a meeting abstract published a year earlier by the journal *Breast Cancer Research and Treatment*, which has been cited 131 times, including a citation by *Lancet* and the *New England Journal of Medicine*. The third place was achieved by the *Journal of Clinical Oncology* that published a meeting abstract that has been cited 78 times since 2005.

From this data, an immediate question arises. What type of article uses meeting abstracts as citations? Using the information collected from the three most cited meeting abstracts, we established that 60.5% came from records categorized as articles and 23.7% originated from reviews published on different indexed journals. Even more surprising was the fact that the authors of these articles and reviews belong to institutions such as Harvard, Stanford and Yale. Thus, even though the diffusion of findings at a scientific conference does not require peer reviewing, the fact that they are being used as references indirectly validates their research output. It is important to remark that a number of these meeting abstracts will eventually publish their results as regular articles. It would be of great interest to the public to find out if the citation number of these meeting abstract is surpassed by the articles that follow-up.

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disclosure

The author has declared no conflict of interest.

reference

1. Alberts B, Hanson B, Kelner KL. Reviewing peer review. *Science* 2008; 321: 15.

doi:10.1093/annonc/mdr406

Published online 24 August 2011

Table 1. Three most-cited meeting abstracts published in ‘cancer’ related journals from 2000 to 2010

Year	Journal	Volume	Page	Citations	Citing journals			
					Average IF	Mean IF	Minimum IF	Maximum IF
2006	<i>Annals of Oncology</i>	17	235	264	8.75	6.00	0.714	41.059
2005	<i>Breast Cancer Research and Treatment</i>	95	S5	131	6.62	4.68	0.350	50.017
2005	<i>Journal of Clinical Oncology</i>	23	2S	78	3.64	3.2	0.126	28.409

IF, Impact Factor obtained from JCR (2009).