

Citation Accuracy in the Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery Literature

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Purpose: Readers frequently assume that the references in an article published in a well-respected, peer-reviewed journal will be cited correctly. However, previous studies have shown that this is not always true. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the citation accuracy in 5 oral and maxillofacial surgery journals.

Materials and Methods: A search was done using PubMed (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/sites/entrez?db=PubMed>) to locate the articles cited in 108 references in each journal. If the article could not be located, a search was done in the specific journal in the medical library. The references were then divided into those with major errors that prevented the article from being located and those with minor errors that still permitted the article to be found.

Results: There were a significant number of citations with major errors in each of the journals that made it impossible to find these articles. No correlation was found between the number of major or minor errors and the rank of the senior author or if the article was submitted from a non English-speaking country.

Conclusions: This study shows that there needs to be a greater effort on the part of authors to provide accurate citations in their articles.

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Readers frequently assume that the references in an article published in a well-respected, peer-reviewed journal will be cited correctly. However, previous studies have shown that this is not always true.¹ Although such inaccuracies do not necessarily affect the accuracy of the material presented in the article, they do make it difficult for the reader to verify statements made in the article when it is not possible to locate the references cited. Having such information is often important in helping the reader judge the value of the particular article. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the citation accuracy in 5 oral and maxillofacial surgery journals, an area in which

this has not been done previously. It was hypothesized that inaccuracies would be found in the references in these journals and that reporting this could lead to efforts on the part of authors and editors to improve the situation.

Materials and Methods

This study involved the following oral and maxillofacial surgery journals: 1) *Journal of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery*, 2) *British Journal of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery*, 3) *Oral Surgery, Oral Medicine, Oral Pathology, Oral Radiology, and Endodontics*, 4) *Journal of Cranio-Maxillofacial Surgery*, and 5) *International Journal of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery*.

The first 6 articles in the first 6 issues of each journal from the year 2005, with the exception of *Oral Surgery, Oral Medicine, Oral Pathology, Oral Radiology, and Endodontics*, were evaluated for citation accuracy. In the latter journal, which only contained 3 oral surgery articles per issue, 2 consecutive years (2004 and 2005) were used to achieve the same number of articles. Thus, a total of 180 articles were included.

The first 3 references in each article were evaluated for a total of 108 citations per journal. If any of the

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first 3 citations was in a format that could not be verified using PubMed (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/sites/entrez?db=PubMed>), or if the citation was from a non English journal, the next citation listed was used instead. A search was then done in PubMed to locate the article using the title. If this failed, a search was done using the name(s) of the author. If the article could still not be located, a search was done in the particular journal in the library of the Virginia Commonwealth University, Medical College of Virginia Campus. The references were then divided into those with major errors that prevented the article from being located and those with minor errors that still permitted the article to be found.² Minor errors were considered to be inaccuracies in the name and initials of the author(s), the article title, the journal title, the year of publication, and the citation style. The references were also checked for the accuracy of the spelling and punctuation. In addition, the rank, if indicated in the article, and country of origin of the first author was documented to determine if there was a correlation between these factors and the accuracy of the citations in the article. This was done to determine if inexperience in the preparation of articles for publication or language barriers could have contributed to inaccuracies in the references.

Results

In the search on PubMed there were 12 references in the *Journal of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery* that could not be found, 9 in *Oral Surgery, Oral Medicine, Oral Pathology, Oral Radiology, and Endodontics*, 9 in the *International Journal of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery*, 8 in the *British Journal of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery*, and 4 in the *Journal of Cranio-Maxillofacial Surgery*. The secondary search in the library resulted in 2 references in the *British Journal of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery*, 1 in the *International Journal of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery*, and 1 in the *Journal of Cranio-Maxillofacial Surgery* being located. Thus, there were 38 major errors in the 180 articles (21%). It was not possible to determine what the major errors were in those references that could not be found, but one can assume that they were in the title or in the name of the senior author of the article.

Three of the senior authors of the articles in the *Journal of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery* in which the references had major errors were professors; 3 were assistant professors; and 2 each were listed as chairman, resident, or consultant (Table 1). In *Oral Surgery, Oral Medicine, Oral Pathology, Oral Radiology, & Endodontics*, 1 was an assistant professor, 3 were residents, 2 were graduate students, and for 3, only the department was listed. In the *Journal of*

Table 1. RANK OF SENIOR AUTHOR AND ERRORS NOTED BY JOURNAL

	No Errors	Major Errors	Minor Errors
<i>Journal of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery</i>			
Associate Professor	12	0	9
Assistant Professor	6	3	6
Professor	14	3	10
Consultant	2	2	5
Resident	4	2	3
Fellow	8	0	1
Chairman	4	2	9
Oral Pathologist	0	0	3
<i>Journal of Cranio-Maxillofacial Surgery</i>			
Assistant Professor	2	1	0
Professor	48	1	23
Chairman	12	0	6
Department only	10	1	4
<i>Oral Surgery, Oral Medicine, Oral Pathology, Oral Radiology, and Endodontics</i>			
Associate Professor	9	0	3
Assistant Professor	14	1	15
Professor	10	0	2
Consultant	3	0	0
Resident	5	3	4
Fellow	9	0	0
Department only	11	3	5
Research Student	0	0	3
Graduate Student	4	2	2
<i>British Journal of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery</i>			
Not listed	—	—	—
<i>International Journal of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery</i>			
Not listed	—	—	—

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Cranio-Maxillofacial Surgery 1 each was listed as professor and assistant professor and for 1, only the department was listed. No author's rank was provided in the *International Journal of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery* or the *British Journal of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery*.

In the *Journal of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery*, 3 of the references with major errors were in articles from a country in which the main language was not English, 7 in the *International Journal of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery*, and 6 in *Oral Surgery, Oral Medicine, Oral Pathology, Oral Radiology, and Endodontics* (Table 2). In the *British Journal of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery* there were no major errors in the references of articles that came from countries in

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