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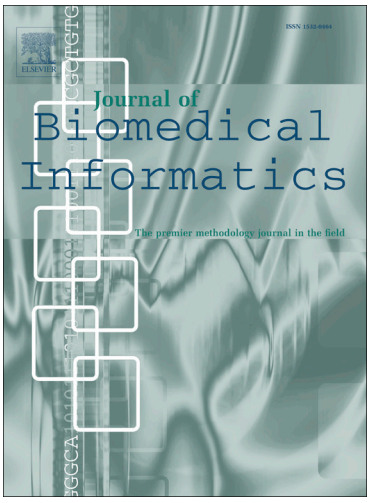

Letter to the Editor

The ranking of scientists

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Letter to the Editor

Title: The ranking of scientists

In a recent issue of JBI, Zerem criticizes the widely adopted H-index and proposes a new score (called the "Z-score") to measure the impact of scientists [1]. While we agree with the author on the limitations of the H-index, we believe the proposed Z-score has its own weaknesses and introduces new problems.

The "Z-score" oversimplifies the attribution of author contributions. According to this metric, authors get a certain amount of credit based on the order of authorship, i.e., the first author gets 100% credit if he is not the corresponding author; the corresponding author gets 50% and the other authors share 50%. If the first author is the corresponding author, he gets 100% credit, while the other authors share 100%. An obvious flaw in this formula occurs when there are only two authors; with the first author also being the corresponding author, the second author would get the same credit of 100%. However, as the number of authors increases, the formula increasingly emphasizes the contributions of the first author and the corresponding author and de-emphasizes the contributions of other authors, without distinguishing contributions among them. This may further exacerbate the already contentious issue of authorship and discourage investigators who are neither first nor last authors from contributing their best efforts to collaborative research projects. Modern science, especially biomedical science, is increasingly dependent on interdisciplinary collaborations. We can foresee some collaborators would want to chop up a study into "minimum publishable units" so they can be first authors too. This runs the risk of obscuring the overall significance and hindering the effective communication of findings of important studies to the scientific community and the public.

A good bibliometric would have to recognize the differences among diverse fields, specialties, research types and publication types of scientific publications. As such differences are well appreciated by many investigators, they are extremely difficult to address in constructing a

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