Impact factor and medical education – a metric of no value?

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Letter

A recent discussion among colleagues East and West led me to a unifying conclusion. That unfortunately getting the message across of the value of medical education as an academic discipline proved difficult. Colleagues many of whom who were trained at a time when medical education and the science of learning was not as well known or understood recited one uniform message: that the impact factor of many medical education journals is low. Well I guess I can't argue with that. However their thinking is based on the collective thinking of many academic institutions. Impact factor guides establishments. It is felt that the higher the factor the higher the value of the work in question. And it seems that so called high impact factor work is proving a measure for promotion, funding and recognition among one's academic community. I for one have issues with this notion. It is well known that the concept of impact factor as a metric is not devoid of manipulation. Self-citation which is common practice among authors publishing within a particular journal can bump up the factor. In addition, most papers published within a typically regarded high impact factor journal are not cited heavily bar the odd few. Article views and citations are also out of synch. There are many papers that receive significant views but do not end up being cited. Therefore the notion of impact factor as an element of valuing medical education is, in essence, meaningless.

Yet it seems many institutes maintain an over rigid thinking approach to impact in general. And value added in the field. There have been some movements in medical education recognising that publishing a paper be it research or reflective should not be the sole indicator of scholarship. And certain institutes are recognising the value of a strong teaching involvement where faculty are acknowledged based on teaching delivered in line with the science of teaching and the feedback they receive accordingly. Yet only time will tell whether this element is deemed by the majority as impactful. And what about the nature of other forms of scholarship. It seems outside our academic niche social media is here to stay and discussing with many of my non clinical friends across the fields of business or the arts they find it somewhat surprising that academia in general has not as yet become accustomed to this. Even though I am deemed a digital native having been born in the 80's I admit to not being a Twitter or Facebook user. Viewing their impact seems to highlight that their work is viewed and followed by people in their thousands.

For me the whole concept is confusing. I guess if I can help to educate and train even just a handful of learners to be
more knowledgeable or skilful then that is my personal impact factor. So over to you? What are your thoughts on the notion of impact factor or impact in general in medical education?

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**Notes On Contributors**

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**Bibliography/References**

**Declarations**

*The author has declared that there are no conflicts of interest.*

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