

Dermatology publications in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: An analysis of 1966-2004 MEDLINE papers

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Abstract:

Objective: To investigate the publications in Dermatology cited in the MEDLINE from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia from 1966-2004

Method: Medline was searched with the aid of Internet provider Pubmed using the same strategy at a given time for all the countries

Results: At the time of search, the Medline listed biomedical research papers from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia totaled 8430. Of these 66 were of Dermatology. King Faisal University, Dammam followed by King Faisal Hospital, Taif were by far the most prolific contributors with 15 and 14 publications respectively. The publications were highest during the year 2002 (16) followed by 2003 (11), most of them being in the English language in the International Journal of Dermatology (28 citations) and Saudi Medical Journal (8 citations).

Conclusions: Data show that the specialty of Dermatology in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is making a rapid progress and is trying to keep pace with the rest of the world in terms of publications. The publications in this specialty are shared by all the regions in the kingdom. This progress is expected to be more with the active role played by Saudi Society of Dermatology and Dermatology Surgery.

Key words: Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Publications, Dermatology

Introduction

The practice of Dermatology in Saudi Arabia is taking rapid strides forward. This is evidenced by the establishment of Saudi Board of Dermatology by The Saudi Council for Health Specialties and by the setting up of many private centers devoted towards the treatment and care of skin diseases.

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There is an analytic report evaluating the nature of medical publications in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA)⁽¹⁾. There is also analytical report evaluating the nature of dermatology publications in Gulf countries as a whole². However, no report has been published about publications of any individual specialty in KSA. Our aim in this report is to focus on evaluation of publications in dermatology in the KSA

Methods and Results

Medline³ was searched with the aid of internet provider Pubmed on 19 June 2004 between 7 pm to 9 pm local time. It was carried out by inserting Saudi Arabia in the search box, selecting the limit to "affiliation" then the number of biomedical publications were obtained, and then the words "and dermatology" was added to the search box along with "Saudi Arabia". The citations obtained for were collected and examined for the year of publication, the number of authors, the name of the journal, and the source of publications. Our search revealed a total of 66 pubmed citations affiliated to dermatology and venereology in KSA out of a total of 8430 biomedical citations. The distribution of these papers according to the year of publication is shown in fig.1. These papers were published in 17 local and international journals. The distribution of the publications among different institutes, colleges, and hospitals in the kingdom is shown in Table 1 and its distribution among different journals is seen in fig.2. Almost all the publications were in the English language and 8 of 66 were by single author.

Discussion:

As per Medline search, Dermatology publications started in the year 1988 with an article⁴ from the Gastroenterology, Dermatology and Radiology departments, Riyadh Armed Forces Hospital, being the first from KSA. This was followed by an article from Al Hada Military hospital⁵ and then an article from Al Huwaylat Hospital in Al Jubail⁶. This coincided with the time of the first publication from gulf countries¹. Due to many limitations, elaborated in an earlier report²⁻⁷, dermatology articles from Saudi Arabia prior to 1988 did not appear in our search method.

Saudi Society for Dermatology and Dermatology Surgery (SSDDS)⁸ has played a major role in the advances occurring in the specialty of dermatology in Saudi Arabia. It organizes yearly National symposia and 2-yearly International symposia. The first national sym-

posium was held in Abha in 1996 and the first international symposium was held in Riyadh in 1989. The performance of SSDDS can be gauged from the fact that so far 8 National meetings and 9 International symposia have been organized by it⁹⁻¹⁰. SSDDS is also publishing "Journal of Saudi Society of Dermatology and Dermatology Surgery". This journal need to be improved². Obligatory membership for all dermatologists is recommended so that the Journal may become available to a wider circle of people. In fact establishing a National Dermatology Database having all Saudi dermatology literature would be a good option. A similar database called SaudiMedbase for all Saudi literature has been established by the Saudi Medical Journal¹¹.

This study showed that almost all the areas of the kingdom are actively participating in the process of publication. This indicates uniform and equal standards of health care availability and distribution for whole of the kingdom. All the health care providers of the Kingdom, namely, the Ministry of Health, National Guard hospitals, Armed Forces Hospital and others are active contributors in achieving this goal.

Also, the results showed the number of publications is increasing and this increase is evident, particularly in recent years. This was reflected by the result of our search which showed that most of the citations are published in recent years (2002, and then 2003). This is a healthy sign indicating that more and more people are engaging in research work. But to give it a wider dimension, the art of paper writing should be incorporated into the training programs. Rather, the academic curriculum of medical students should have this as a subject whereby, how to write, how to do a research and how to criticize a scientific manuscript, should be taught. Academic dermatologists should invite residents to the labs, clinical research centers and homes where the faculty can explain to them what they are doing and why it is important¹². Supervisors in the training programs should act as a teacher who empowers the pupil to learn and grow by themselves but protect and keep an affectionate eye on him imparting wisdom, ethics, discipline and respect. Indeed these should behave as episodes in the students and be passed on to future generations of dermatologists¹³. The earlier this is done, the better, because learning a skill early in one's career will be of immense help in polishing and sharpening the minor details of the skill.

The study revealed that out of 66 publications, the maximum number of publications belonging to a single

author was eight. A few of papers written by more than one authors are a result of overseas collaborative works between local dermatologist and dermatologists from abroad¹⁴⁻¹⁵. This may be attributed to factors like easy communication by the internet, training of some of the dermatologists abroad, their membership in international dermatology societies and to their attendance in dermatology conferences in other countries.

Financial support and other incentives should be provided to the authors by their hospitals, otherwise the authors will lose interest for research and publications. In this context SSDDS has taken a lead by approving a financial grant for projects and research done in dermatology in Saudi Arabia (further details about this grant can be obtained from the society by visiting its website; www.ssdds.org). Also Ministry of Health (MOH) has decided to give annual reward for doctors with special emphasis on number of publications and, likewise, Saudi Council for Health Specialties (SCHS) has approved a monetary award to the best research done by the resident during the training program. It is expected that these steps by MOH, SSDDS and SCHS will lead to more progress in the area of research.

It needs to be highlighted that publications are important but what is more important is whether the results and recommendations made in the publication are followed and implemented in letter and spirit, wherever and how so ever, possible. For this a mechanism should exist by which the recommendations of the studies are transferred into actual health care plan. All the publications and research work will be worth the efforts only if it is practically applied so that the society gets the benefits and improves their lot.

Also, this study highlighted the major role played by Saudi Medical journal in the publications of dermatology manuscripts (8 citations). In Saudi Arabia, at the moment there are two main journals in the forefront, the Saudi Medical Journal and the Annals of Saudi Medicine. Both of these have played a major role in the advancement of publications in KSA. In the last 24 years, the Saudi Medical Journal has evolved as one of the leading scientific educational journals in the kingdom and abroad¹⁶. Starting with 2 editions a year in July 1979, in London, the journal is currently being published monthly, processed, edited and printed inside the kingdom¹⁶. It achieved the Index Medicus status in 2001¹¹. HRH Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz is the Patron of the journal and General Abd El Hameed El-Faraidi is the founder of the journal¹⁶.

On the other hand Annals of Saudi Medicine was first published in 1980(1400AH) as a collaborative work between College of Medicine, King Khalid University Hospital in King Saud Hospital and King Faisal Specialist Hospital and Research centre. It is publishing an issue every 2 months and is printed in King Saud Press. The citations published in Annals of Saudi Medicine are not shown in our study because it is not indexed in the MEDLINE.

One obvious fact derived from our results is that the output from major institutes, big centers and hospitals with major facilities is less than expected. Perhaps, it would be a good idea to set up a research board in each and every institute and hospital. The objective of this would be to have annual meetings to review the pace and progress of scientific researches in the institute or

hospital and try to help and remove the obstacles, if any, hindering its progress. At the core of good, standard and continuous research are good and optimum facilities. Quality research needs quality tools like good offices, good secretarial services, good library with internet facilities and subscriptions to standard medical database websites and good photography departments. Included in this should be the efficient use of electronic media and computers. A lot of valuable time is being lost by doctors because of lack of offices in the hospitals leading to their gathering in one room and wasting time in chatting.

We hope our colleagues in other specialties would perform similar search in order to record their progress and remove the obstacles to further progress.

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Table.1: Distribution of Dermatology publications from Saudi Arabia according to its sources

The Source	No. of publications
King Faisal University,Dammam	15
King Faisal Hospital,Taif	14
Riyadh Armed Forces, Riyadh	6
King Fahad National Guard, Riyadh	5
King Khalid University Hospital, Riyadh	4
King Fahad University Hospital,Al Khobar	4
King Faisal Specialist Hospital and Research centre, Riyadh	3
Najran general Hospital	3
Afar Central Hospital	2
King Saud University, Riyadh	2
King Saud University,Abha	1
Al Hada Military Hospital,Taif	1
Al Huwaylat Hospital,Jubail	1
Mohammad Al Dossary Hospital	1
Saudi Aramco-Dhahran Health Centre, Dhahran	1
Total	66

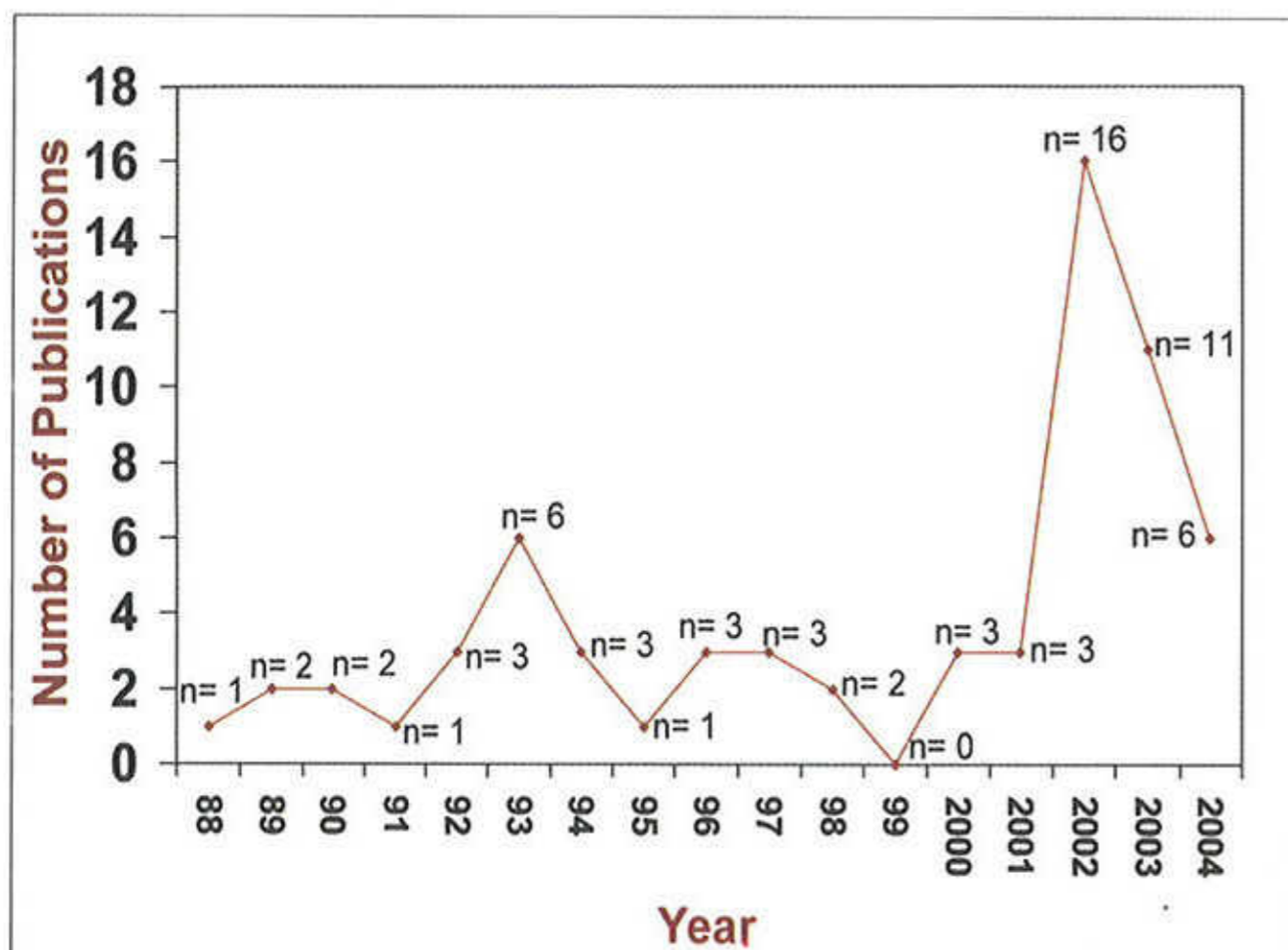


Figure 1: The annual distribution of the dermatology publications from KSA. Note that the number cited for 2004 is only up to June only.

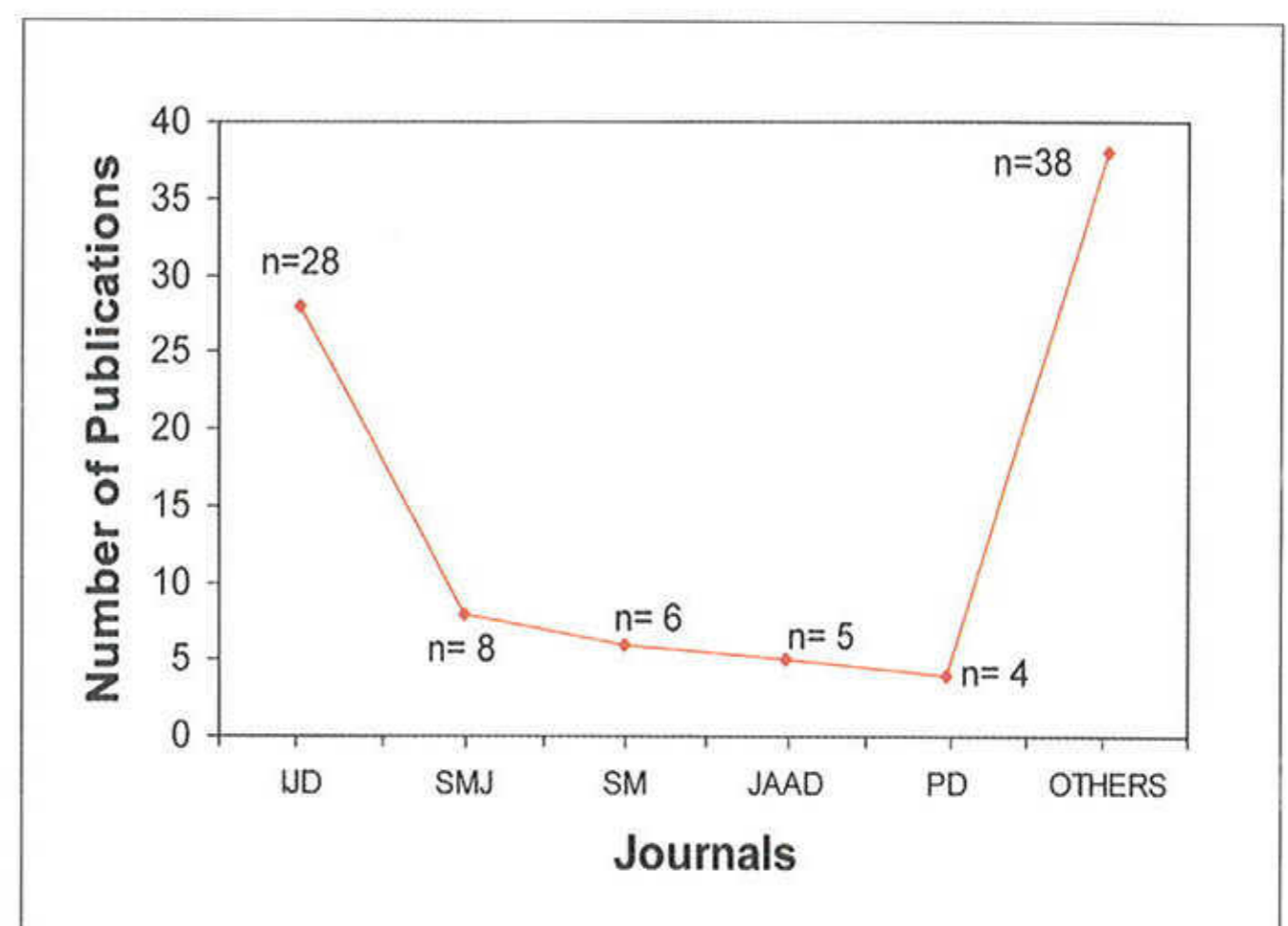


Figure 2: The distribution of dermatology publications from KSA. IJD=International journal of Dermatology, SMJ=Saudi Medical Journal, SM=SKINmed, JAAD=Journal of American Academy of Dermatology, PD=Pediatric Dermatology, Others=the remaining 12 journals that contain each, 3 or less citations