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CONTENTS

From the desk of the Editor

Main Article

- A Comparative Study of Conventional versus Endoscopic Septoplasty 1
Ankita Singh, Nalini Bhat, Pallavi Bhandarkar, Ram Singh
- Sino-Nasal Outcome Test - 22 : Translation, Cross-cultural Adaptation, and Validation in Local Language 10
Aditya M Yeolekar, Vidya Rokade, Kiran Shinde, Netra Pathak, Haris Qadri, Kaustubh Kahane
- Do Socio-Economic Factors Play a Role in Delayed Presentation of Complicated Chronic Otitis Media (Squamous type)? 16
Nidhi Vohra Maggon, Ashwani Sethi, Harikesh, Surendra Vishwasrao Pimparkar
- A Novel Technique of Using Sponge as Post-Operative Nasal Packing 23
Ike Thomas, Jathin Sam Thekkethil, Ramesh Chandra Kapoor, Tina Thomas, Pramod Thomas
- A Study of Efficacy of Intraoperative Application of Mitomycin-C in Endoscopic Dacryocystorhinostomy 29
Harikesh Sharma, Ajay Mallick
- Juvenile Nasopharyngeal Angiofibroma: Changing Paradigms in Management 35
Vijay Bhalla, Ramakrishnan Narayanaswamy
- A Correlative Study Between Size of Tympanic Membrane Perforation, Pure Tone Audiometry and Intraoperative Findings in Tympanoplasty 43
Santosh U P, Sridurga J, Aravind D R

Case Series

- A Comparative Study between ORIF and ORIF with Mandibulomaxillary Fixation in Unfavourable Mandible Fractures 48
Kripamoy Nath, Rudra Prakash, Bapan Devnath, Avinava Ghosh
- A Multi-Modality Surgical Management in Laryngeal Stenosis 51
Ashfaque Ansari, Anju Thomas

Case Reports

- Aberrant Thyroid in the Parapharyngeal Space 60
Sharanabasappa Rudragouda Malipatil, Ciju K George, Isha Vidisha, Ravindrakumar Ningappa Karadi
- Near Complete Laryngopharyngeal Obstruction due to Vegetable Foreign Body in an Infant 64
Rahul Gupta, Ashok Gupta
- A Peripheral Primitive Neuro-ectodermal Tumor (pPNET) of Larynx 69
Raman Wadhwa, Usha Sehwat, Sharad Hernot, Pawan Kumar Gahlawat, Aman Jakhar
- External Laryngocoele or Anterior Jugular Vein Aneurysm (A Rare Clinical Entity): A Paradox Solved by A Few Simple Non-Invasive Radiological Tests 73
Somesh Mozunder, Shirish Dubey, Aniruddha Dam, Anup Kumar Bhowmick
- Nuchal Fibroma: An Uncommon Neck Mass 76
Soumyajit Das, Subhasish Mukherjee, Barun Sharma, Subash Tamang

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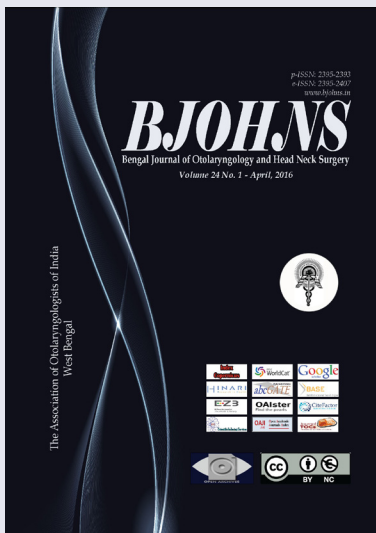
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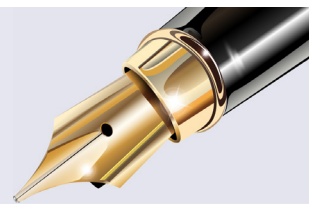
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From the Desk of the Editor



The recent exponential rise in the number of academic journals worldwide has led to immense confusion among authors regarding the relative value of these journals and consequentially their published research articles. With varying terms being bandied about by the indexing sites and even the publishers, a large number of which are misleading and downright unscrupulous, authors are often duped into paying for publication in 'predatory' journals and lose money as well as valuable exposure of diligently accumulated research work. The term 'Impact Factor' or 'Journal Impact Factor' was devised by Eugene Garfield to help in this regard.

The Impact Factor is calculated based on the number of citations in a particular year, of articles published in the previous two years, and the total number of articles published in the journal in the past two years. Although it seems to be a simple mathematical calculation and has often been used as a proxy measure of the relative importance of a journal, there has been a lot of criticism from various quarters regarding numerous ways it may be manipulated or misinterpreted.

The term 'Impact Factor' should only be used for values obtained from Journal Citation Reports but dubious companies often produce fake impact factors, a fact taken advantage of by predatory publishers to deceive authors. Even the original Impact Factor may be influenced indirectly in various ways. For example, journals may try to publish more review articles as they generate more citations per article rather than low yield ones like medical case reports. A journal may further force authors to cite articles from their previous issues in an attempt to increase the impact factor. Also, as the citation numbers may be heavily skewed across different articles in the same journal, the actual citation of an individual article may be well below the average of all the articles in that particular journal.

Given the controversies associated with Impact Factors, it is probably best to keep in mind the official statement of the European Association of Science Editors recommending "that journal impact factors are used only - and cautiously - for measuring and comparing the influence of entire journals, but not for the assessment of single papers, and certainly not for the assessment of researchers or research programmes."

Dr Saumendra Nath Bandyopadhyay
Editor,
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