



Life as an editor of the *Journal of Stroke*, my third and most vulnerable child

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How the *Journal of Stroke* Was Born

The *Journal of Stroke* (JOS), previously called the *Korean Journal of Stroke* (KJS), was established as the Korean Stroke Society's official scientific journal in 1999. At that time, the Korean Stroke Society requested me to become the first chair of the publishing committee. KJS was an ordinary, domestic Korean journal, and I do not have any particularly interesting or impressive memories of the journal covering the 3-year period from then until I resigned. My position was then filled by the next chair, Dr. Ji-Hoe Heo. However, my relationship with KJS did not end after my resignation. Instead, as I now recall, it was much stronger than I initially expected. In 2012, about 10 years after I resigned from my initial position, the Korean Stroke Society again offered me the editor job.

In those days, there was growing enthusiasm among Korean scientific societies to publish their own journals as international journals written in English and to achieve a reasonably high journal impact factor (JIF) from Thomson Reuters (now Clarivate). The Korean Stroke Society was no exception to this trend and decided to transform KJS into a high-standard, international journal. I think that the society decided to recruit me again partly because after leaving my job as an editor of KJS, I served as the chief editor of the official English-language journal of the Korean Neurological Society. At that time, I, together with other associate editors (AEs), successfully developed a domestic society journal into an international journal—the *Journal of Clinical Neurology* (JCN)—with a reasonable JIF. Currently, the 2021 JIF of JCN is 2.566.

While the members of the Korean Stroke Society may have recognized my ability to develop scientific journals, I do not have a “golden touch” and found it extremely challenging to develop both JCN and JOS. Fortunately, I had excellent colleagues who joined me in the team as AEs in developing JOS: Dong-Wha Kang from Asan Medical Center and Oh-Young Bang from Samsung Medical Center. Our first task was to give the journal a new name. Although the society members had given many good suggestions for journal names, we eventually settled on *Journal of Stroke*. We did not include “Korean” in the journal name, partly due to my experiences with JCN. Although I had also named the JCN, some senior members of the Korean Neurological Association were against dropping the word “Korean,” deeming it unacceptable for Korean journals. However, the other AEs and I thought otherwise. Considering the international image of the name “Korea,” it would be difficult to compete with journals with

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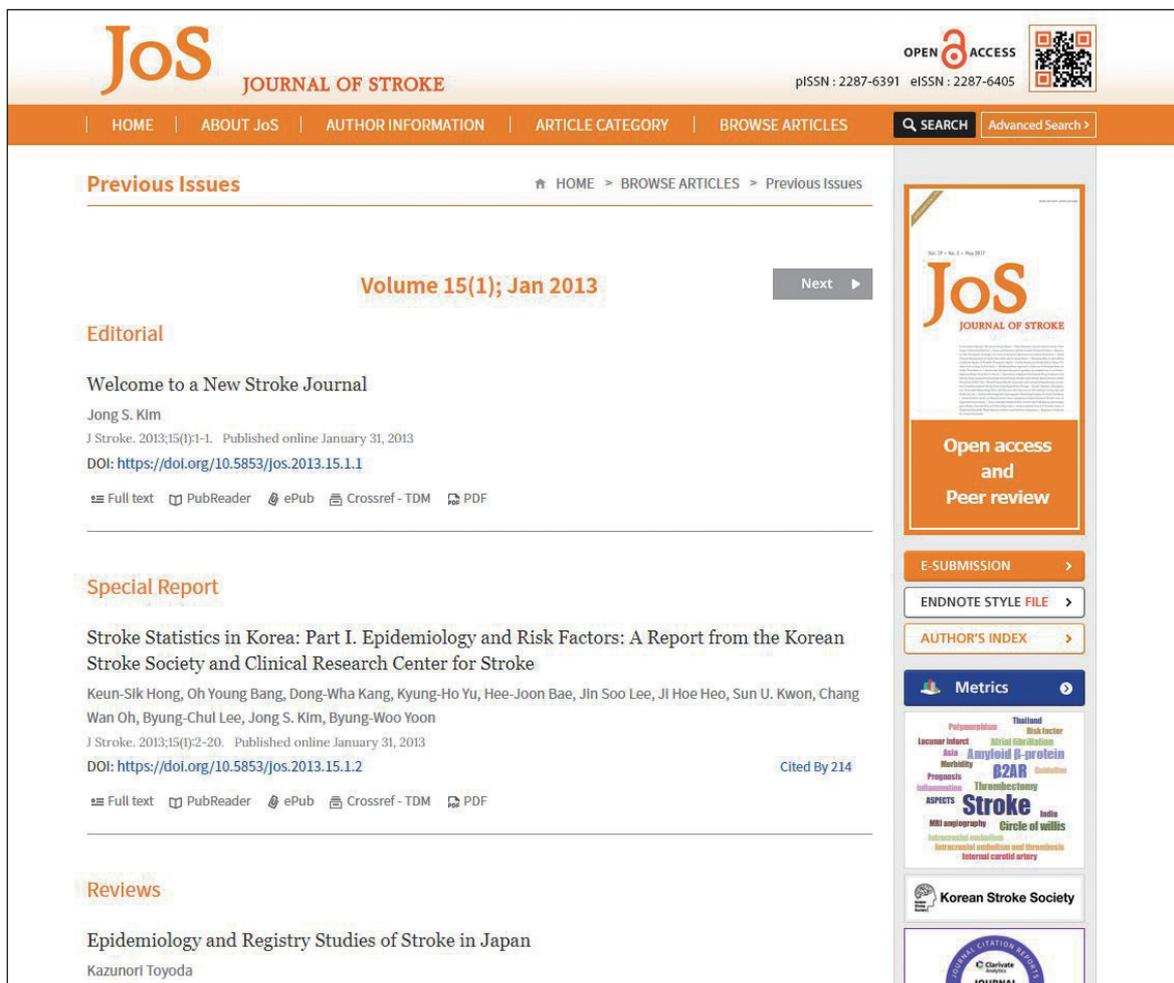


Fig. 1. Screenshot of the journal homepage with article titles of the first issue in 2013, including statistical and epidemiology articles.

names that included geographical terms like “American” or “British” if its name contained the word “Korean.” An English editor who worked at a famous journal production company also advised me to omit the word “Korean,” saying that German scientists would probably hesitate to submit their work to a Korean journal. Some argued that *Journal of Stroke* would be a rather simple and indistinguishable name from that of other journals; however, we thought otherwise. While it is true that the name is very similar to those of existing journals, such as *Stroke*, *International Journal of Stroke*, or *Journal of Stroke and Cerebrovascular Disease*, having a name similar to well-known scientific journals would help convince authors to publish with us when they try to search for appropriate journals for their work. We thought that science and art should be innovative, yet believed that scientists are more conservative than artists. This is how JOS was born, and the first issue was released in early 2013 (Fig. 1) [1].

The Process of Being Indexed in International Databases

JOS was quickly registered in PubMed Central, and we hoped to have it registered in the Science Citation Index (SCI) as soon as possible. Instead of passively waiting to be registered, we chose a more aggressive strategy; we wrote to Thomson Reuters explaining why our journal should be SCI-registered. In the letter, we emphasized the importance of a scientific journal that deals with Asian issues. For instance, while extracranial atherosclerosis (e.g., carotid artery disease) is the main cause of ischemic stroke in the Western hemisphere, intracranial atherosclerosis (e.g., middle cerebral artery disease) is the most common atherosclerotic disease associated with ischemic stroke in Asians and Africans. Nevertheless, scientific papers and textbooks have exclusively described stroke symptoms, mechanisms, diagnoses, and treatments based on carotid artery disease, whereas descriptions of intracranial athero-

sclerosis are very rare. We explained that this unbalanced information in the literature is a major deficiency, since Asians and Africans account for more than 70% of the world's population. Intracranial atherosclerosis, therefore, deserves more attention than extracranial atherosclerosis, and JOS—a journal developed in Asia—needed to be registered to improve the balance of scientific information in this world. We sent the letter in August 2014, and received a response 2 months later from Thomson Reuters saying, “Yes, your journal deserves it.” Thus, just 20 months after the release of the first issue, our journal was already included in the Web of Science Core Collection (Science Citation Index Expanded, SCIE). The decision was quickly made in our favor, probably because we chose to send a letter that reasonably explained the necessity of JOS. My own career as an editor may have also contributed to this success. At that time, I was an AE of the *International Stroke Journal*, *Cerebrovascular Disease*, and the *Journal of Stroke and Cerebrovascular Diseases*. I was also an editorial board member of *Stroke*, and a founding editor of JCN. My track record may have convinced the editors or assessors for Thomson Reuters.

How to Increase the JIF

Before launching JOS, we discussed possible ways to increase the JIF. All scientists wish to submit their work to high-IF journals, but JOS had no impact factor at the time of launch. Therefore, we had to submit our own papers or invited articles as initial publications. We thought that if we wished to make JOS a high-JIF journal, an early and rapid increase in the JIF would be an essential strategy. More qualified manuscripts would be submitted to a journal with a high JIF. The more excellent-quality papers published, the more they would be cited. Through this positive cycle, the JIF would eventually increase. This process is like how life works—rich people become richer because they have money to invest, whereas the poor get poorer without such money. For this strategy, we believed that review papers on exciting and important topics were necessary for the early issues. Therefore, we invited Korean and international colleagues to write about stroke epidemiology. In this way, papers on stroke epidemiology from Korea, USA, Japan, China, and India were consecutively published. We also published a series of reviews on Asian issues, such as intracranial atherosclerosis, moyamoya disease, and hemorrhagic strokes. As expected, these papers were well cited, and the first JIF released in 2016 was surprisingly high, at 4.795. This value was the second highest among all Korean scientific journals and the highest among international journals devoted to stroke research, excluding only *Stroke*. Since then, many papers from various parts of the world have been

submitted to JOS. The following year, the JIF increased to 5.576, which was the highest among Korean journals. The JIF has continuously increased since then, reaching 8.632 in 2021. Now, JOS has become a truly international journal. Aside from Korea, the countries that have most frequently contributed to JOS include—in order of frequency—USA, Germany, Spain, Switzerland, China, France, the Netherlands, Canada, and England.

Support from Colleague Editors

This remarkable achievement was not solely due to my own efforts. At present, I am supported by six AEs: three Koreans (Ji-Hoe Heo from Yonsei University, Keun-Sik Hong from Ilan-Paik Hospital, and Dong Eog Kim from Dongkook University Hospital) and three international AEs (Edip Guro from Harvard University, David Liebeskind from UCLA, and Bijoy Menon from Calgary University). We also have an assistant editor, Jin Soo Lee from Ajou University, a manuscript editor, Joonsang Yoo from Yongin Severance Hospital, and a devoted managing editor, Juhee Jin. I am greatly indebted to these excellent, diligent, and cooperative colleagues. Due to the large number of submissions, about two-thirds receive a “rapid rejection” after the initial screening. While we make it a rule to inform authors if their papers are rapidly rejected within a week of the initial submission, AEs are often busy. In particular, unlike Korean AEs, international AEs occasionally have long vacations, during which they may be difficult to contact. In such cases, I handle the papers by myself after informing the relevant AEs. Other papers are reviewed by two or three reviewers, and we try to make a final decision as quickly as possible. Currently, the acceptance rate of submitted papers is about 5%.

Challenging Environment

Although JOS has received much praise, it still faces challenges. There are strong, competing journals that also enjoy increasing JIFs. Because these journals represent areas with large populations, such as the USA, China, or Europe, it is becoming more and more difficult to improve our JIF. The same seems to be the case for other Korean journals. All editors of Korean journals should try their best to improve their journals through their own effective strategies. In addition, I think that high-quality papers can only be produced in societies with high social standards backed by stable budgetary support. Thus, the country's economy and social standards have an important bearing on the future of Korean journals.

Conclusion

I have been connected to JOS for more than 30 years, from 1999 until now. I have spent a lot of my time and energy on this journal. I am now very proud to see that JOS has grown into an international, high-JIF journal. However, I do know that in this competitive world, we still need more painstaking work to improve or even maintain the quality and increase the position of JOS in the global ranking of academic journals. For me, JOS is like a family member. I have tried my best to take care of my children (one son and one daughter) when they were young, but they are now grown up. I feel that JOS is my third and the most vulnerable child who still needs my constant care.

Conflict of Interest

No potential conflict of interest relevant to this article was reported.

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Reference

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