

Thinking Globally in the Pursuit of Individual Identity: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the International Journal of Medical Students (IJMS)

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Inequity and inequality are pervasive in healthcare despite recent efforts to advance inclusivity and multiculturalism in research and practice.¹ Diversity refers to “the recognition of the visible and invisible physical and social characteristics that make an individual or group of individuals different from one another, and by doing so, celebrating that difference as a source of strength for the community at large.”² Recent circumstances in global health, including those highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic, have demonstrated societal insufficiencies concerning equity especially relating to the disease burden and health outcomes of black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC).^{3,4} This systemic discrimination can hinder the accessibility of health services, compounding inequity. Following a set of predefined diversity, inclusion, and equity policies may aid in combatting these problems. Therefore, we need to reflect on our mandates and their development to foster an inclusive environment free from unfair circumstances and nourished by equitable access to opportunities, collectively embodying equity and equality.

Diversity promotes balanced perspectives with important insight from marginalized voices. Accordingly, diverse teams have enhanced problem-solving skills and innovation capacity, resulting in better work output and productivity with enhanced collaboration.⁵ Recruiting a diverse pool of individuals also provides inclusion of underrepresented groups. When pursuing competitive career paths in medicine, it is beneficial to have contributed to the scientific literature by serving on a journal’s editorial team. Therefore, diversity may be highlighted as impacting individual as well as institutional growth. However, imbalance in the representation of groups of people (e.g., gender) is not an uncommon phenomenon, as journals have been demonstrated to foster increasingly homogenous editorial boards.⁶⁻⁹ The International Journal of Medical Students (IJMS), however, has a history of highlighting the achievements and research of a diverse pool of medical learners. The IJMS aims to elevate these promising upcoming leaders, promoting their

voices regardless of their institution and sociodemographic background. The IJMS is free to submit to, publish in, and read - fully accessible at no cost. Furthermore, the IJMS strives to include contributors and editorial members from various countries in all global regions. In 2021 alone, the IJMS featured authors from 39 different countries. Additionally, our team represents over 60 different countries with people affiliated with institutions in all seven of the World Bank geographical regions (*Figure 1*) and all four of the World Bank country income groups. The IJMS is unique because it also features a student experiences section for medical learners who have had perspective-changing experiences in their field. In addition, there is a newly introduced option in 2022 to publish articles with a summary section in the author’s language of origin to further increase visibility. Furthermore, the IJMS supports the global community of medical learners by taking an active stance on current issues such as the ongoing conflict in Ukraine,¹⁰ and climate change.¹¹⁻¹³

At IJMS, we strive to represent our community as a whole, and we believe in global and multicultural insight when publishing innovative solutions to problems concerning healthcare and publication biases. We find strength in our differences and acknowledge individuality with respect, equity, and inclusivity. Therefore, to materialize our vision, we have decided to proclaim our dedication to representing researchers regardless of their gender identity, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, geography, career stage, religious beliefs, socioeconomic level, national origin, language, marital status, and political ideology. IJMS has demonstrated this by publishing on important issues relating to gender,^{3,14-16} culture,¹⁷⁻²⁰ and ethnicity.^{21,22} Through our statement on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), we take a positive step towards representing the underrepresented and welcoming researchers, editors, authors, ambassadors, and reviewers from various communities irrespective of the above-mentioned domains of diversity.

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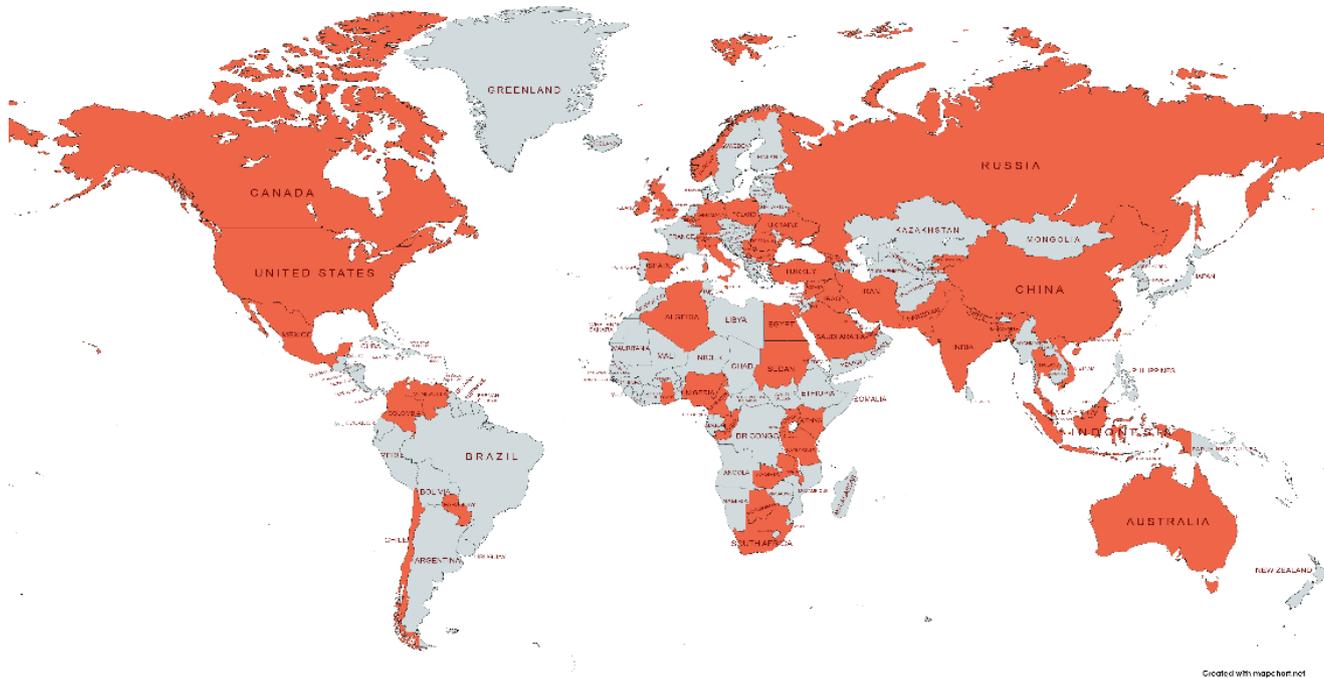
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Figure 1. International Journal of Medical Students Editorial Team Geographic Distribution by Country.



We have further formulated a Committee on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion which will be tasked to improve the overall DEI status of the Journal by maintaining equity in the representation of researchers as well as in the availability of opportunities. Our priority with this implementation is to be transparent about our posture as a Journal regarding diversity and inclusion practices. We will do our best to maintain practices that reflect our statement and improve it as appropriate. Feedback and constructive discussion about this topic is relevant to us. We are open to this and will use it to initiate discussions and make iterations to our statement to improve our practices further, when and if appropriate. The role of students is particularly important in this aspect. Students can provide insightful feedback on issues pertaining to equity that they could be experiencing in their home countries and institutions. This can allow us to take a more comprehensive approach to our statement and direct us to incorporate views and perspectives that align with our objectives

of adopting a worldwide inclusive practice of scientific publication and dissemination.

Principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion will continue to shape the navigation of the IJMS practices and, consequently, the perspective of our Editorial Team. We acknowledge the complexity of developing and implementing comprehensive practices of diversity and inclusion within our community, and hence, we are committed to longitudinally improving our approach as we develop further.²³ We recognize that achieving a comprehensively diverse community requires continuous and dedicated effort. Therefore, we consider it our responsibility to ceaselessly work towards our vision of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

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