

medical research when the distribution may not be defined. While I realise these methods are relatively new, they do seem unreasonably ignored in undergraduate medical education.

1. GebSKI VJ, Keech AC. Statistical methods in clinical trials. *Med J Aust* 2003; 178: 182-184.
2. Siegel S. Non-parametric statistics for the behavioural sciences. Kogakusha, Tokyo: McGraw-Hill, 1956.
3. Kaplan DT. Resampling stats in MATLAB. Arlington, Virginia: Resampling Stats, Inc., 1999. □

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IN REPLY: While one can view the world as being “discrete”, the assumptions underpinning most common statistical methods in analysis of clinical studies are “continuous” distributions. In fact, statisticians go to enormous lengths to approximate discrete systems as continuous ones (lifetime analysis, normal approximations, etc).

The measurement scale by which study outcomes are assessed needs careful consideration (to ensure consistent precision and units of measurement). However, both practical and statistical considerations allow for the more common definitions of continuous and discrete measurements to be just as effective for statistical comparisons. Indeed, there is frequently little loss of statistical efficiency when “continuous” variables are appropriately categorised into ordinal groups.¹

Resampling methods randomly sample the data repeatedly to estimate the underlying population distribution parameters (eg, mean, standard deviation, etc). They can be very useful in solving specific problems in which the underlying properties of the data used to make treatment comparisons are unknown and using other statistical approximations is deemed to be inappropriate. However, these are special-

The “omnipotent” Science Citation Index Impact Factor

John H T Ellard

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TO THE EDITOR: I read with interest the article in the Journal on ranking medical journals and the fallacies to be found therein.¹

I have a simpler method. I subscribe to two classes of journals: those specialising in psychiatry, and more general journals. The psychiatry journals I keep entire. However, as my house is of modest size I cannot do that with the general journals, so I tear out and file the articles that I find interesting and informative. You will be interested to know that in the past month I have filed away one article from the *Lancet*, one from the *New England Journal of Medicine* and three from the *Medical Journal of Australia*. What better measure of merit could there be?

1. Lundberg GD. The “omnipotent” Science Citation Index Impact Factor. *Med J Aust* 2003; 178: 253-254. □

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