Small but Mighty: Letters-to-the-Editor Published on the Zika Virus, 1952 - 2018

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Objective:
To conduct a bibliometric analysis of Letters-to-the-Editor published on the Zika Virus between 1952 and 2018.

Methods:
A PubMed search was conducted on the terms (Zika OR ZIKV). Results were limited to Publication Date = 1952-2018, and Publication Type = Letter. Results were exported to EndNote, and the full-text (PDF) of each Letter was examined. Non-Letters, duplicates, irrelevant results, and incorrectly indexed items were excluded. Letters discovered serendipitously were added. The total number of Letters published and their date distribution was determined. The Letters were categorized as Reader Response, Author Reply, Observation, Case Report, or Research. Additional parameters included the number of authors, number of references, use of graphics, and funding.

Results:
Between 1952 and 2018, 499 Letters-to-the-Editor about the Zika Virus were published, with the majority being published in 2016 or later. These were categorized as 29.9% Reader Responses, 11.2% Author Replies, 22.4% Observations, 14.0% Case Reports, and 22.4% Research. The Letters were written by 1-35 authors, and included 0-63 references. Over 38% of Letters contained graphics, and 15% reported funding support. An interesting anomaly were the 104 letters authored or co-authored by one particular individual, which constituted 20.8% of the total.

Conclusion:
Contrary to conventional wisdom, this study has shown that Letters-to-the-Editor are often much more than simply reader responses to a published article, and may serve as a source of clinical or research information. However, this study also demonstrates that the characteristics of this publication type may make it susceptible to various anomalies.

References