



Romanian Association of Balneology

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BALNEO
RESEARCH

Balneo and PRM Research Journal

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ROMANIAN ASSOCIATION OF BALNEOLOGY

Policy title: Citation Integrity and Journal Self-Citation Reduction Plan, 2026–2028

Balneo and PRM Research Journal

Romanian Association of Balneology

Rationale

The 2025 preliminary Clarivate data show that *Balneo and PRM Research Journal* has a journal self-citation contribution of 62.2% to the JIF numerator. Although the outgoing self-citation rate is 15.7% and the journal cites 571 external source titles, the JIF-numerator share of self-citations is too high and may distort the JIF. The editorial objective is not to remove legitimate scholarly citations to prior *Balneo* articles. Rather, the objective is to ensure that such citations are necessary, proportionate, transparent, and not used in a manner that may distort journal-level metrics.

Governance

A **Citation Integrity Committee** will be created with the following members:

Role	Responsibility
Editor-in-Chief	Final responsibility for policy enforcement
Managing Editor	Operational screening and record keeping
Bibliometric Integrity Officer	Quarterly citation audits
External Editorial Board Member	Independent review of flagged manuscripts
Publisher representative	Annual compliance review

At least one member involved in flagged-manuscript review must be external to the Romanian Association of Balneology.

Immediate editorial policy statement

The following text will be added to the journal website, author instructions, reviewer instructions, and editorial decision templates: " *Balneo and PRM Research Journal* does not require, request, or encourage citation to the journal unless such citation is scientifically necessary. Authors, reviewers, editors, and guest editors must not add or recommend citations for the purpose of improving journal metrics. Citations to prior articles in *Balneo and PRM Research Journal* are acceptable only when they are directly relevant to the scientific, methodological, clinical, or evidential content of the manuscript. All recommendations for journal self-citation must be justified in writing and may be removed during editorial review if they are not necessary."

Manuscript-level screening thresholds

Every submitted manuscript will be screened before peer review and again before acceptance.

A manuscript will be flagged for independent citation review if any of the following conditions are met:

Trigger	Threshold
Citations to <i>Balneo and PRM Research Journal</i> articles from the previous two years	>3
Total citations to <i>Balneo and PRM Research Journal</i> articles from any year	>5
Share of reference list citing <i>Balneo and PRM Research Journal</i>	>10%
JIF-window self-citations in a short communication or case report	>1
JIF-window self-citations in an original article	>3

Trigger	Threshold
JIF-window self-citations in a review article	>5
Any editor or reviewer recommends adding Balneo citations	Mandatory written justification

These are not mechanical rejection thresholds. They are **audit triggers**. A flagged citation may be retained if scientifically necessary.

Reviewer policy Reviewer-suggested citations to Balneo articles must be individually justified.

Reviewer forms should include the following mandatory statements:

1. “I did not request citation to *Balneo and PRM Research Journal* for non-scientific reasons.”
2. “Any citation I recommended is necessary for the manuscript’s scientific accuracy, methodological completeness, or interpretation.”
3. “I understand that citation recommendations intended to influence journal metrics are inappropriate.”

Required justification for retained self-citations

For every flagged manuscript, the handling editor must complete a short citation-justification form:

Question	Required answer
Which Balneo references are cited?	DOI and title
Are they in the JIF window?	Yes / No
What claim do they support?	Specific claim
Is an external equivalent available?	Yes / No
If yes, why is the Balneo citation still necessary?	Scientific justification
Were any Balneo citations suggested by reviewer/editor?	Yes / No
Final decision	Retain / remove / replace / reduce

Editorial decision policy

Before acceptance, the handling editor must certify that:

- the reference list is scientifically proportionate;
- Balneo citations are necessary and not excessive;
- no citation was added for metric-related reasons;
- all flagged self-citations have been reviewed;
- the final reference list contains adequate external literature.

Special policy for review articles and systematic reviews

Because reviews can strongly affect JIF-window citation behavior, all review articles must include:

- search strategy;
- databases searched;
- inclusion and exclusion criteria;
- evidence that external literature was comprehensively considered;
- citation audit before acceptance.

A review article with more than five JIF-window Balneo citations requires approval by the Citation Integrity Committee.

Special policy for thematic issues

Thematic issues and guest-edited collections can unintentionally generate citation clustering. Therefore:

- each thematic issue must have at least one external guest editor;
- guest editors must sign the citation-integrity policy;
- manuscripts within the same thematic issue must not be encouraged to cite each other unless scientifically necessary;
- citation patterns within the issue will be audited before publication.

Quarterly monitoring dashboard

The journal will produce a quarterly internal dashboard with the following indicators:

Indicator	Frequency
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Indicator	Frequency
Outgoing JIF-window self-citation rate	Quarterly
JIF-window Balneo citations per accepted article	Quarterly
Number of manuscripts flagged	Quarterly
Number of Balneo citations removed or replaced after audit	Quarterly
Number of reviewer/editor-suggested Balneo citations	Quarterly
External cited-source diversity	Quarterly
External citing-source growth	Annual
JIF-numerator self-citation share	Annual, when data available

Quantitative targets

Metric	2025 baseline	2026 target	2027 target	2028 target
Outgoing JIF-window self-citation rate	15.7%	≤12%	≤10%	≤8–10%
JIF-numerator self-citation share	62.2%	≤45%	≤35%	≤30%
Articles with ≥5 JIF-window self-citations	12	≤5	≤3	≤2
Articles with >50% JIF-window references to Balneo	23	≤5	≤3	0–2
External citing sources	63	≥70	≥80	≥90
Manuscripts audited before acceptance	0 formal system	100% flagged	100% flagged	100% flagged

The incoming JIF-numerator share cannot be controlled as directly as outgoing citations, because it depends partly on citation behavior by external authors. Nevertheless, the journal will reduce internal contribution and increase external visibility.

External visibility measures

To reduce dependence on internal citation, the journal will implement:

- broader international editorial-board recruitment;
- invitations to external authors and external review articles;
- promotion of published articles to rehabilitation, balneology, gerontology, environmental medicine, and physical therapy communities;
- indexing and metadata quality checks;
- DOI, title, and abstract optimization for discoverability;
- encouragement of article-level dissemination through academic networks;
- collaboration with international societies in rehabilitation and balneology.

Annual public transparency statement

The journal should publish an annual statement such as:

The journal monitors citation practices to ensure that references are selected for scientific relevance and not for journal-metric influence. The editorial office reviews manuscripts with elevated journal self-citation and maintains internal audit records. The journal does not require or encourage citation to its own articles unless scientifically justified.

Corrective review of 2025 pattern

The journal will use the 2025 Clarivate file as a baseline audit. Particular attention will be paid to the subset of 12 articles that generated five or more JIF-window self-citations, because those articles accounted for 41.0% of the self-citations in the dataset. Future manuscripts with similar patterns will be independently reviewed before acceptance.

Documentation to retain

The journal should retain the following documentation for possible Clarivate follow-up:

- updated author instructions;
- updated reviewer instructions;
- updated editorial decision form;
- manuscript-level citation-audit forms;
- quarterly dashboards;
- list of flagged manuscripts and decisions;
- annual summary of self-citation metrics;
- evidence of external editorial-board expansion;
- evidence of external dissemination actions.

Outgoing citations from 2025 Balneo articles

The Citing sheet contains **1,350** outgoing JIF-window references from 2025 *Balneo and PRM Research Journal* articles to 2023–2024 scholarly literature.

Metric	Result
Total outgoing JIF-window references	1,350
Journal self-citations to <i>Balneo and PRM Research Journal</i>	212
Outgoing journal self-citation rate	15.7%
Citations to all external journals combined	1,138
External share of outgoing references	84.3%
Distinct cited source titles	572
Distinct external cited source titles	571
2025 Balneo citing items represented	164
2025 Balneo items with at least one self-citation	74
2025 Balneo items with no self-citation	90

The top outgoing sources were:

Source	Count	% of outgoing references
BALNEO PRM RES J	212	15.7%
LIFE-BASEL	28	2.1%
J CLIN MED	26	1.9%
INT J MOL SCI	24	1.8%
CUREUS J MED SCIENCE	23	1.7%
CHILDREN-BASEL	18	1.3%
SCI REP-UK	17	1.3%
RETOS-NUEV TEND EDUC	17	1.3%
SENSORS-BASEL	16	1.2%
BIOMEDICINES	15	1.1%

Cited sheet: incoming 2025 citations to 2023–2024 Balneo papers

The Cited sheet contains **341** JIF-numerator citations to 2023–2024 *Balneo and PRM Research Journal* content.

Metric	Result
Total 2025 JIF-numerator citations received	341
Self-citations from <i>Balneo and PRM Research Journal</i>	212
Self-citation share of JIF numerator	62.2%
External citations received	129

Metric	Result
External share of JIF numerator	37.8%
Total citing sources	64
External citing sources	63

The top incoming citing sources were:

Citing source	Count	% of JIF numerator
BALNEO PRM RES J	212	62.2%
MEDICINA-LITHUANIA	10	2.9%
J CLIN MED	10	2.9%
LIFE-BASEL	9	2.6%
HEALTHCARE-BASEL	8	2.3%
DIAGNOSTICS	5	1.5%
CLINICS PRACT	4	1.2%
SPORTS	4	1.2%
BIOMEDICINES	3	0.9%
FRONT MED-LAUSANNE	3	0.9%

The 2024 JCR public report for the journal gives useful comparative context: it reports a 2024 JIF of **1.1**, a JIF without self-citations of **0.5**, **187** JIF-numerator citations, and **98** self-citations; it also lists **28** citing sources for 2024. By contrast, the 2025 Clarivate data file shows **341** JIF-numerator citations, **212** self-citations, and **64** citing sources. Thus, external citations increased from approximately **89 in 2024** to **129 in 2025**, and external citing sources increased from approximately **27 to 63**. However, internal citations increased even faster, which explains the 2025 suppression risk.

E. Article-level concentration analysis

The data do **not** show that a single cited Balneo article dominates the JIF numerator:

Article-level metric	Result
Number of distinct cited Balneo items in Cited sheet	152
Highest citation count for any single cited Balneo item	10
Share of JIF numerator represented by the top cited Balneo item	2.9%
Share represented by top 5 cited Balneo items	12.6%
Share represented by top 10 cited Balneo items	21.4%

Citing sheet also shows that a limited number of 2025 Balneo articles contributed a substantial share of self-citations:

Citing-article metric	Result
2025 Balneo articles with ≥ 5 self-citations	12
Self-citations contributed by those 12 articles	87
Share of all self-citations represented by those 12 articles	41.0%
Highest self-citation count in one 2025 Balneo article	20
Share of all self-citations represented by that one article	9.4%

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