nature
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Health sciences

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Last year, the Nature Index was broadened to include author affiliations from articles in more than 60 medical journals. The expansion, which covers all major disciplines and specialities in clinical medicine and surgery, offers new insights into global publishing trends in the health sciences. This is the first supplement to explore some of those trends.

Two things immediately stand out. The first is that the United States dominates high-quality output in the health sciences, contributing a Share* of 8,468 to publications in the Nature Index. China, which in 2023 overtook the United States in natural-sciences output in the database, trails in a distant second place, with a Share of 2,108.

The second noticeable data point is the dominance of Harvard University in the field. The institution, based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, has a Share (822) that is almost three times higher than the second-ranked institution, the US National Institutes of Health (290) (see page S14).

An extraordinary amount of money is invested in health-sciences research, but this hasn't translated to a faster pipeline for new therapies. The increasing complexity of clinical trials is part of the problem, and something that researchers are hoping artificial intelligence can help to address (see page S2). Others are rethinking how therapies are assessed in trials to make the results more meaningful. For example, could data impact people with Alzheimer's and other progressive conditions by measuring how many 'good years' a medication can give, rather than comparing scores on cognitive tests? (see page S18)

Outside clinical trials, there are structural weaknesses in health-sciences research that need urgent attention, such as the lack of women in leadership positions (see page S21). If institutions do not work harder to increase diversity at the top levels of academia, they risk damaging the talent pipeline and ultimately health outcomes for everyone.

Bec Crew
Senior editor, Nature Index

**Nature Index's signature metric Share, used in this supplement, is a fractional count for an article allocated to an institution, city or country/region, that accounts for the proportion of authors on the article whose institutional affiliation is with that institution or location. Adjusted Share accounts for the small annual variation in the total number of articles in the Nature Index journals. We point out that the Nature Index provides just one indicator of research performance, and many other factors must be taken into account when assessing the quality of research or institutions.*

Illustration by Taj Francis

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