

Editorial

Importance of publishing research

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Sir William Osler once quipped, “Medicine is a science of uncertainty and an art of probability”. No wonder then, that knowing what is probable, what is unlikely and what is truly ridiculous makes one a better diagnostician.¹ It is here that medical journals are a guiding light. Medical journals are a convergence of medicine, research and journalism and are expected to blend the values of all three. The mission of a medical journal is not only to serve as a portal for the dissemination of research knowledge in the field of health science, but also to ensure that vital information reaches as many students, teachers, and researchers as possible.

The English novelist Somerset Maugham once said “We don’t write because we want to; we write because we have to”.² Among the many duties of medical professionals, the duty to write is a binding one and importantly, includes the duty to publish what has been written. Research on healthcare improvement is incomplete until it has been published. In fact, we may even go so far as to say that research completed and not published is the same as research not done at all.³ It is not only essential to pursue a research question with enthusiasm and dedication, but it is equally important to have the perseverance to publish those research findings. Publishing allows authors to share with the world medical

community their original findings, reasoning, medical breakthroughs, and proposed changes to standards of practice. The desire to publish also ensures that the authors keep themselves updated with the latest research and clinical practices. This not just helps expand science and improve patient care, but is also today inextricably linked with peer recognition, institutional recognition, career innovation and advancement including promotions. It also ensures that we leave behind a documented heritage of our findings and accomplishments for generations to come.⁴

While the most important requirement for a medical college teacher even today remains aptitude to teach students, he should also be a skilful practitioner and a fine researcher.⁵ In the recent past, duration of service was the only criterion for academic promotion as per the Medical Council of India (MCI), the statutory body with the responsibility of establishing and maintaining high standards of medical education in India. Then in July 2009, the gazette notification by the MCI changed the landscape for the medical community. Not only was there a relaxation of the number of years of experience for academic promotion; but there was a stipulated number of research publications that was made mandatory by the MCI, and that too as the first author in an indexed/national journal.⁶

This caused significant displeasure among the teaching faculty, as unfortunately in India, the number of PubMed indexed journals is very few. However, luckily, while reading between the lines, the MCI has not specified the indexing agencies/databases in the minimum requirement for academic promotion of teachers in medical colleges.⁶

When we assume that the entire pool of teaching faculty start doing original research, the publication of the same may take a very long duration. Reading into the new directives, we find that a research paper is actually a publication of original work, wherein a problem or hypothesis is analyzed and the materials, methods and results published after adhering to all the guidelines of research methodology.⁷ Naturally, conducting research in this manner becomes a time consuming process. Another factor that adds to the time required for eventual publication is that a standard peer reviewed indexed journal may have a waiting period of at least one year for accepted publication. In fact the peer review process may take more time than the duration of the research itself. Taking note of these practical difficulties, the MCI has now modified these regulations through its amendments in the years 2009 and 2010 as follows - for a 'Professor' post - The requirement is "Four research papers accepted/published in index/national journal of the respective specialties as the first/second author on cumulative basis. Out of these four research publications minimum two research publications must be published during the tenure of the Associate Professor" and for the 'Associate Professor' post - The requirement is "Two research papers accepted/published in index/national journal of the respective specialties as the first/second author during the tenure of the Assistant Professor".⁶

As the regulatory authority of medical education in India, the MCI is right in enforcing these modified regulations amongst the teaching

fraternity thus ensuring that the fraternity will continue to be a premier one. As a consequence of the MCI's 'Publish or Perish' agenda, publishing research will not only allow one to build credibility amongst his fellow colleagues but it will also ensure that the authors keep themselves updated with the latest research and clinical practices as mentioned above. By rising to the occasion, they will also act as good role models to their students, thereby inculcating in them the desire to get involved in quality research which ultimately helps the society at large.

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