

*Plenary lecture*

## **Medical journalism: difficulties and opportunities**

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Numerous changes have taken place in terms of opportunities for editors of journals in countries of the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region in recent years, including the number of associations where editors can access information and advice and the increased opportunities for indexing and hosting offered by the internet. At the same time these opportunities place an onus on editors to compete.

Publishing quality comprises having a clear vision for the journal, a clear mandate and terms of reference for the editor, clear journal policies, and being consistent and regular with publication. The latter is a particular problem in the Region and a main contributor to poor quality, visibility and credibility. Journals that do not publish regularly, whether in print or online, do not attract good research. In this regard, it is important to have commitment and a clear business and process-oriented model. With regard to quality content, the problem for the journals is not just how to attract the good research but how to reject the bad. All journals are looking for interesting, relevant research that is properly conducted, has a clear message, is consistently presented and is understandable.

An impartial review system that is impervious to pressure on the editor and editorial board is essential, while attracting good research also comes back to the issue of publishing quality and the need to maintain standards in policy, consistency and regularity. Editors also need to talk to researchers, to make the journal known.

There is a major role for editors in the Region in advocating with decision-makers for better funding for research, and with faculty deans for training on research proposal writing, on research methodology and on writing. Finally, journals need to be relevant to the community, to patients and to policy-makers in terms of the research they publish. National

associations of medical editors can play an important role in advocacy at the national level with politicians and policy-makers, universities and funding bodies. National associations should also be working with higher education, setting standards to ensure better and relevant research and minimum standards for journals. National bodies can also play a powerful part in promoting and advocating publication of national research in national journals, where research of local importance should be published.