

Iran's experience of improving Peer-Reviewed Medical Journals during 2004-2010

*Ali Akbari Sari MD, PhD
Associate Editor, Hakim Medical Journal,
Director, Commission for Accreditation and
Improvement of Iranian Medical Journals
Deputy for Research and Development,
Ministry of Health and Medical Education,
Assistant Professor Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran.
email: akbarisari@tums.ac.ir*

In 2004 seventy seven medical journals were published in Iran of which two were indexed in ISI, none of them were in Medline or PubMed, eight were covered by EMBASE, two by SCOUPS and only one had a standard website's. Over the years the Commission for Improvement of Iranian Medical Journals has played an important role in their improvement with the result that the quality and quantity of Iranian peer reviewed medical journals has improved rapidly. This is evident from the fact that until August 2010 the total number of Peer Reviewed biomedical journals published in Islamic Republic of Iran has increased to one hundred sixty two.

Of these twenty two are indexed in ISI/Thompson (Science Citation Index Expanded) Web of Science and eleven of them have an Impact Factor. Seven Iranian medical journals are covered by Medline or PubMed Central. Thirty five Iranian Medical Journals are covered by EMBASE, thirty in SCOUPS. One hundred thirty five Iranian Medical Journals have standard website which can produce XML version compatible to the international database. Despite making this remarkable progress, still there are many journals which are published late and need further improvement so that they can qualify for indexation in relevant international databases.

Medical Journals in Iran are published by University of Medical Sciences, Research Centers or by scientific societies and institutes. The Commission for Accreditation and Improvement of Iranian Medical Journals is based in the Ministry of Health. It has nine-subcommittees which monitor and support these medical journals to improve their quality, help them in getting indexed in various international databases and have their own standard

websites. More recently, an Association of Medical Editors has also been formed in Iran.

Role of the Commission

The Commission defines the criteria for a good standard journal. There is a system of regular evaluation and feedback. We have prepared manuals, protocols and regulations, chalked out training programmes. Other support which the commission provides to the medical journals include standard software, facilitating them in indexing in various databases, advice on important issues besides providing little bit of financial support for some of the medical journals.

Some of the technical problems that we in the Commission have noted in the Iranian medical journals are that almost 55% of the abstracts are too long, some journals do not have structured abstracts. There is no consistency or the Abstracts do not provide complete information i.e when these manuscripts were received, when they were accepted for publication. In some cases complete information about the authors i.e. their e mail address is missing.

Then in the References, there is no uniform standard and they are also not consistent. Almost 45% of the journals face problems with tables and figures. Again 55% of the journals do not have standard website which needs improvement while some medical journals also face problems in editing.

Other issues which are faced by the Iranian medical journals are lack of good quality scientific manuscripts because usually authors send their good quality papers to overseas medical journals. Authors also complain of long delays in peer reviews. Then there are no professional medical publishers who can help in timely publication of these medical journals. Above all there is lack of citation to other papers in the region.

Commission for Accreditation and Improvement of Iranian Medical Journals and other government departments have played a positive role in improving the quality of the medical journals published from Iran. We offer advice and technical support to local journals as well as those published from this Region. However, there are still several important challenges which need solution.