

# Editorship in the EMRO Region: Challenges and possible solutions

*Excerpts from the presentation by Dr. Farhad Handjani MD\**

A vast majority of owners and proprietors of the biomedical journals published from the Eastern Mediterranean Region have high expectations but little knowledge of various activities involved in publishing. Financial constraints and lack of any organizational set up create further problems. Most often they are interested in final outcome and not the path. Different problems faced by Editors include financial constraints, lack of trained manpower, inadequately trained authors, paucity of good quality peer reviewers, problems with indexing, visibility, lack of proper work flow plan, lack of adherence to timelines, human resources with knowledge of computer software and other capabilities. Some of them have small offices with limited space. In addition they also face lack of professional support team i.e. associate, assistant editors, managing editors, technical and copy editors etc

Most of the editorial boards are ceremonial, make little or no contributions and it is difficult to get together all of them. Different journals envisage different roles for the Editors. Most of the Editors are part time, lack proper training, work honorary, are busy with many other activities and mostly it is one man show. Authors are not patient and in order to get published early, indulge in simultaneous submission, rejection of manuscript is taken as personal, authors are not trained in research methodology, ghost authorship and gift authorship are quite common in our region, falsification, and fabrication and plagiarism are on the rise due to pressure related to academic promotions.

Readers are often neglected, the number of readers is often considered unimportant. Most journals have no attraction for the readers. It is not

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clear how much real impact the publications have on improvement of patient care and on the medical community. Again most of the journals have no real marketing strategies and lack initiatives to increase their subscriptions. Since most of those selected to peer review the manuscripts do it honorary, the peer review process is very slow. It is extremely difficult to have a good pool of reviewer's database. The peer reviewers have no incentive hence at times some of them do not pay adequate attention and the quality of review is of variable quality. Since most of the reviewers have inadequate training in peer review, often they learn as they do it. In view of inconsistency, most often editors feel the need for a final reviewer before the manuscript is accepted for publication. International indexing and the Impact Factor have put lot of pressure on Editors and their journals. At times the national policies regarding biomedical journals are not in agreement with the current trends of indexing.

### **Possible solutions**

- \* Editors should be full time having a strong professional team to support them.
- \* Editors should be appointed or selected from those who are experienced.
- \* Editors professional honesty and integrity should be unquestionable who cannot be influenced under any circumstances.
- \* There is a need for proper planning before starting a journal. The pre-requisites include having a proper office space, minimum essential personnel, equipment and adequate funding.
- \* Proper advertising strategies to promote the visibility of the journal through different means.
- \* Improvement in the quality of paper used and printing is important.
- \* Editorial Board members and editorial team should be selected from those who have some experience and are also interested to contribute.
- \* If possible and if funding allows, the journals must offer some incentive to the reviewers.
- \* All journals must have a good reviewer's database consisting of national and international experts.
- \* Each country must have some training programme for authors, reviewers and the Editors of biomedical journals.

- \* For a traveler, there is no path, since paths are made by walking. (Antonio Machado). The journals should try to appeal to the authors and readers of their region. This will enable them to pool together their resources and increase their visibility while still addressing their key local issues.
- \* Efforts should be made to strengthen the credibility of local and regional indexing systems.
- \* The journals must use innovation in designing different sections of the journal moving away from the routine generics to attract readers.
- \* From time to time the journals must assess their local and regional health impact of what they have published because it will be their real Impact Factor.