

How to improve co-operation between editors?

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In Pakistan, medical journals are mostly being published either by medical institutions like the College of Physicians and Surgeons Pakistan (JCPSP), King Edward Medical College (Annals of KEMC), Pakistan Army (Pakistan Armed Forces Medical Journal), Liaquat University of Medical & Health Sciences (JLUMHS), etc. or by medical associations and organizations like Pakistan Medical Association (JPMA), Society of Surgeons of Pakistan (Pakistan Journal of Surgery–PJS), Pakistan Cardiac Society (Pakistan Heart Journal), etc. Publications like Pakistan Journal of Medical Sciences, Pakistan Journal of Cardiology, etc. are being published by professionals or some groups in the medical profession which is an exception.

The editors of these journals are usually senior academicians selected or nominated by these associations or institutes, though at places vested interests and personal likes and dislikes also play a role in the appointment and selection of editors by these institutions. As these editors mostly come from specific groups or institutes and they have limited time at their disposal, apart from financial and other problems to deal with, hence most of them are usually busy in their own worlds (some in their egos), with little knowledge of what's happening around the world of medical journalism, and in other journals, both locally and abroad. So, to begin with, there is hardly any relationship that exists among these editors hence the question of any meaningful co-operation among them does not arise. However, there are exceptions where some editors do have personal friendships with few other editor colleagues.

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At this juncture the question does arise why is there a need for co-operation amongst editors? The answer is manifold because if one looks around, it becomes evident that most journals and editors are facing similar problems and difficulties, and if the editors meet each other and have some sort of rapport or co-operation, it can lead to some collective solutions. Besides by uniting and co-operating they will be better off in facing pressures, learn from each others healthy criticism thereby improving their own capabilities and hence the quality of their journals. As a group they can help promote research and scientific writing, discourage and keep a check on plagiarism, duplicate publications and the likes, besides preparing juniors to get ready for the future. The following points in summary highlight the necessity of co-operation amongst editors:

- To discuss difficulties and problems.
- To learn from each others' experience.
- To improve their capabilities and hence the quality of the journal.
- To help each other in case of pressures.
- To promote scientific writing.
- To encourage research.
- To stop plagiarism, duplicate publication, etc.
- To train personnel for future.

Having established that at present very little co-operation and relationships exist amongst editors in Pakistan, the next question that arises is: How do we go about developing this co-operation? I feel that things should start at the local level i.e. cities or provinces and then proceed to national, regional and international levels.

Co-operation at local level

Editors in provinces or different big cities like Karachi, Lahore, Rawalpindi, etc. should meet regularly, both at social and academic gatherings. They should exchange copies of their journals and get feedback and review. They should also act as reviewers for each others' journals, thus helping overcome the shortage of good reviewers. In this age of development when the world is shrinking into a global village each journal should have its own website and the editors should communicate with each other using fax, internet and on-line facilities to the maximum. This will not only

promote co-operation and friendships but also lead to the development of editor kinship and editors' fraternity. These groups or forums can later become branches or chapters of a national organization.

Co-operation at National level

As mentioned earlier co-operation at local level can proceed to the development of a national organization, the local groups in turn becoming its branches or chapters. Regular national meetings, seminars, symposia, workshops and on-line conferences can lead to the promotion and solidifying of co-operation at the national level. Pakistan Medical & Dental Council, with the aim of streamlining medical journals and blacklisting fake and sub-standard journals, called a couple of meetings of the editors and started some movement in this direction by forming the Pakistan Association of Medical & Dental Editors (PAMDE).¹ It did not work as it was a half hearted approach and had the usual tilts, being bureaucratic and state sponsored.

Pakistan Medical Journalists' Association² (PMJA) can become the platform of a national organization, as it is around for some time with neutral people and policies, and quite a few editors as its members. However, some spade work and a lot of interaction is needed to achieve this goal. Organizing this 1st ever conference on medical editing is a step in the right direction and can prove to be a stepping stone for the same. Dr. Maqbool H. Jafary (Chief Editor, Pakistan Journal of Medical Sciences), Mr. Shaukat Ali Jawaid (Managing Editor Pakistan Journal of Medical Sciences), Prof. Maj. Gen. M. Aslam (Chief Editor, Armed Forces Medical Journal) and the whole organizing committee deserves a lot of credit and applause for bringing most of the editors and interested delegates together in this very successful conference.

Co-operation at Regional & International level

Once the editors gather on a national platform, life can be much easier as one can get involved at regional level with organizations like Eastern Mediterranean Association of Medical Editors³(EMAME) and South Asia Association of Regional Co-operation (SAARC), as well as international level with organizations like World Association of Medical Editors (WAME)⁴ Pubmed, etc. Holding regular conferences, seminars and workshops at these levels will definitely help elevate the standards of the local editors and journals. WHO, especially its EMRO section, can play an important

and vital role in the development of this strategy, as this will lead to a fruitful symbiosis; the elevation of the medical editors and journals will have an important, positive and direct impact on the national health of the countries, and hence the world at large.

It is not difficult to visualize that co-operation between Editors is a need of times. However, looking at the status of the current co-operation amongst editors in Pakistan, it is worth commenting that the topic of the paper should be How to Create Co-operation between editors, rather than How to Improve Co-operation between Editors?

References

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