

EDITORIAL

A JOURNEY FROM MEMBER OF EDITORIAL BOARD TO CHIEF EDITOR

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It was sometimes during 1987 that we the few of the medical faculty of Ayub Medical College, Abbottabad, Pakistan while responding to a presidential directive decided to start our own research medical journal. Journal of Pakistan Medical Association was the only Pakistani indexed journal with Index Medicus at that time. The moving factor behind the idea was difficulty in publishing the original articles by our faculty that was an essential requirement for their promotions in career. The journal was named after the institution under the patronage of the sitting principal of the college, Dr. Mujahid Akbar. Professor M. A. Khaliq was the first Chief Editor while Prof. Nazakat Begum took over as Editor. I was privileged to become one of seven members of the first editorial board. Only regular faculty was included on the editorial board that was to relinquish their responsibility on their retirement from the service of the institution. I was honoured to be selected as Chief Editor in 1995 for Volume 7 onwards and as I am due for retirement from the services of this institution, hence, this is my last appearance as Chief Editor of the journal.

Under the circumstances when there was no designated office, secretarial assistance or funds provided by the institution it was good luck to have Dr. Jahangir A. Khan, the Principal Research Officer of Pakistan Medical Research Centre as managing editor whose office assistance and management made the journal survive. Nevertheless the commendable team effort let the journal to stand on the firm footing. None of us were experienced in publication of a research medical journal then; hence, initial issues of the journal were based on following the pattern of some other journals. Editorials of first few issues were written by the editors themselves. These were not subject oriented, therefore, neither a title nor authorship was endorsed at the end of these.

The journal started as a 43 page document. There was no external peer review. The members of editorial board or some of the college faculty rendered free services not only to review but to correct the articles format, language etc. with consent of the authors. At times it would mean changing the whole face of the article. First issue appearing in January 1988 included only four original research articles. Although policy for number of original articles to be published was not fixed, only four or five articles per issue could be published till 1996.

Queue for articles to be published was not all that impressive for two issues every year. Recent volumes included as many as twenty-nine original publications while more than 400 articles remain in waiting.

Recognition of a journal is an important aspect of its impact. It was in June 1994 that the journal could obtain declaration for printing and publication from District Magistrate, Abbottabad. In February 1996 it was registered by ISSN International, Paris and than the same year it was included in the Index Medicus database of WHO Eastern Mediterranean Regional Index. Pakistan Medical and Dental Council awarded its recognition in 2001 while in the same year it was included in Index Medicus/Medline of USA. It is indexed by Index Copernicus Warsaw since September 2005 and its electronic version was indexed for publication by the CAB abstracts and Global Health Database since March 2006. Higher Educational Commission, Government of Pakistan has awarded the journal category 'Y' in November, 2007 that is only second highest of its category credits. I must emphasize here that JAMC is 2nd of the four biomedical journals of this country indexed by Medline/Index Medicus of USA.

Achievement of that order does not come easy way and I will fail to my duty if I overlook mentioning tremendous efforts put in by all my colleague editors, members advisory board, statistical and secretarial staff, specially Dr. Ahmed Badar who through his devotion remained the star figure in bringing the progress to the journal.

The editors of JAMC naming Dr. Hymayun Shah and later Dr. Abdul Aziz Awan, who is to shoulder Chief Editor's responsibility from next issue onwards, kept the journal in order and so were the managing editors Dr. Muhammad Ayub and Dr. Shahid Ali Shah.

One of the special features of this journal was the cover page pictorial article designed and provided mostly by Dr. Shamim Anwar that has been appreciated by many and still remains as attraction of the title page.

In response to the World Health Organization Health Inter Network Access to Research Initiative, an increasing number of the world's leading medical publishers are encouraged to provide free Web-based access to scientific journals

particularly in those countries that cannot afford to pay for them. Since we view disseminating medical knowledge as among our greatest honour and responsibilities, we heartily endorse this practice, and let free access to full text of the journal on the official website of Ayub Medical College¹, in addition to making free abstracts available at other websites including PubMed. I endorse hard work of Dr. Ayub, Dr. Ahmed Badar and Dr. Shahid Ali Shah in this regard and hope this practice shall continue in future as well.

Regarding editorial independence there has been a consistent policy of not letting influences affect the evaluation, selection or editing of individual articles except that priority has been given in queuing the reviewed and accepted for publication articles written by the faculty of Ayub Medical College as this was the primary objective of initiation of this journal. However, over the period of time this trend has diluted and relatively strict tracking of the priority is being practiced.

In order to make editorial decisions based on validity of work the difficulty has arisen time and again. The journal cannot claim flawless record in this respect. Advice has been sought time and again when such issues like critical articles towards commercial or other influential authors were to be published.

A 10-years bibliometric study of this journal from 1997 to 2006² was recently published that is best representative of the trend and success story of JAMC. This is the first ever such study conducted in this country. Quantitative growth of the articles per

year has increased by three folds in these 10 years. Geographical distribution of the authors includes articles from 19 countries. Nearly 97% articles were indigenous from within the country. However, other articles outside Pakistan were from wide and varied areas of the world including UK, Canada, and USA. A total of 7769 (77.94%) citations were from foreign journals. Journal's self citation somehow remains very low, i.e., 43 out of nearly 10,000 citations. This perhaps shows the peculiar psyche of the authors who take more pleasure by citing from the western journals. The impact factor of the journal is one aspect the new editorial team shall have to think ways and means to improve.

Leaving the journal in an official capacity after 20 years is bittersweet; but there is the great satisfaction of seeing the successful end product of one's work. So with this editorial, I bid farewell to the Chief Editor's Chair of the JAMC that gave me an opportunity to serve medical journalism in a capacity that, perhaps, I never would have been able to attain otherwise; for that, I will always be grateful to my senior, contemporary and junior colleagues, the authors who decorated the journal with their intellectual efforts and newly incumbent editorial team to provide me this opportunity to thank all.

REFERENCES

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2. Ullah M, Butt IF, Haroon M. The Journal of Ayub Medical College: a 10-year bibliometric study. Health Info Libr J. 2008;25(2):116-24.