

PUBLICATION AUDIT, HANDLING PUBLICATION MISCONDUCT AND NEED FOR EDUCATION OF AUTHORS: A PAKISTANI PERSPECTIVE

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A self publication audit of Pakistan Journal of Medical Sciences (Pak J Med Sci) for the Year 2007 reveals that we have made gratifying progress. Some of the major accomplishments has been recognition of Pakistan Journal of Medical Sciences by Science Citation Index Expanded (SCIE) by Thompson/ISI of USA better known for Impact Factor (IF). The journal has also been approved by the Higher Education Commission, Government of Pakistan. Not only that, there has been significant increase in the number of manuscript which we received for publication during 2007. In the year 2004, total manuscripts received were one hundred forty while it increased to two hundred nine in 2005, two hundred sixty eight in 2006 and three hundred fifty four during the year 2007. (Table-I)

The mere fact that Pakistan Journal of Medical Sciences continues to attract manuscripts from research scientists from many countries of the world is itself an indication of improving standards, the trust and confidence on the part of authors. Our efforts continue to further improve the quality of its contents to achieve our objective of making it one of the best peer reviewed medical journals from this part of the world. A major hurdle which still remains is its Indexation in Medline. We have submitted our application for review and are

hopeful of a positive decision during the year 2008.

Number of manuscripts received in 2007

During the year under review, we received a slightly increased number of ninety eight manuscripts from Pakistan as against ninety

Table-I: Manuscripts received from Pakistan & Overseas during 2004 - 2007

<i>Name of Country</i>	2004	2005	2006	2007
Bangladesh	04	03	07	07
Brunei	-	-	-	01
Cameroon	-	01	-	-
Canada	01	03	-	-
China	-	-	01	-
Egypt	-	-	02	-
India	02	09	04	21
Ireland	01	01	-	-
Iran	21	74	90	149
Iraq	-	02	03	02
Jordan	04	08	14	10
Kuwait	01	02	02	02
Lebanon	01	-	-	-
Malaysia	-	-	03	01
Nepal	01	01	01	-
Netherlands	-	-	01	-
Nigeria	02	07	16	32
Oman	-	-	03	01
Pakistan	78	76	90	98
Palestine	02	01	05	05
Poland	01	01	03	01
Qatar	-	01	-	-
Russia	-	-	02	-
Saudi Arabia	09	10	11	11
Thailand	01	01	-	-
Tunisia	02	-	-	-
Turkey	05	02	02	05
UAE	01	-	-	-
UK	01	05	08	06
USA	02	01	-	02
Total	140	209	268	354

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during 2006. The major reason for this is that most of the authors from Pakistan appear to be interested more in number game so as to have as many publications to their credit as possible. They are reluctant to go through the peer review process and prefer to submit manuscripts to those journals that do not follow a strict peer review process. Moreover, either the quality of their manuscripts is not so good or they are interested to get their manuscripts published as soon as possible under various compulsions while a few good quality manuscripts are submitted to journals which are indexed in Medline. Since we could not oblige some of the authors with early publication, nine of them decided to withdraw their manuscripts after submission. Yet another thirty one manuscripts were finally rejected despite revision more than once as they were not considered fit for publication.

Number of manuscripts published in 2007

The number of manuscripts that we published during the year 2007 was two hundred thirty six as against one hundred twenty during the year 2006. (Table-II) This became possible as we had to publish two additional issues during the year, one in April-June 2007 and the other in October-December 2007 to clear the backlog of approved manuscripts and also reduce the publication time. Hence we published six issues during the Year 2007. As regards the category of manuscripts published, majority were original articles (n=159) followed by case reports (n=40) and brief communications (n=14) (Table-III).

Manuscripts from Iran

As usual there is a continuous increase in the number of manuscripts that we receive from authors from our brotherly country Islamic Republic of Iran. Total number of manuscripts received during the Year 2007 was one hundred forty nine as against seventy four in 2005 and ninety in 2006. However, over 50% of the manuscripts being received from Iran need massive editing to improve the English language. At times these manuscripts have to be

Table-II: Number of manuscripts published during 2006 and 2007

Country	No. of manuscripts published 2006	No. of manuscripts published 2007
Bangladesh	01	05
Brunei	-	01
Canada	01	-
Holland	01	-
India	06	10
Iran	38	89
Iraq	02	02
Jordan	06	07
Kuwait	-	02
Malaysia	-	01
Nigeria	03	13
Nepal	-	01
Oman	-	03
Palestine	03	02
Pakistan	48	81
Poland	-	01
Russia	-	01
Saudi Arabia	06	08
Turkey	01	03
UK	04	04
USA	-	02
Total	120	236

re-written. This is one of the service that we happily provide to our authors from Iran just to help and encourage them. Of course it demands more time for processing, final editing and publication is also a bit delayed though we are trying our best to accelerate the peer review process to reduce publication time.

Handling publication misconduct

Increasing cases of publication misconduct are also being detected. More recently an author from Palestine drew our attention to a case of duplicate publication. One of the articles that we published from Jordan in our issue of April-June 2006 had already been published in Archives of Iranian Medicine.^{1,2} This is despite the fact that the author had given us a written undertaking that the manuscript was an unpublished material and was being exclusively submitted to Pakistan Journal of Medical Sciences. We wrote to the author to explain his position but there was no response. What was more surprising in this case was the fact that the contents of both the manuscripts were almost similar and identical although one

Table-III: Category of manuscripts, published in 2007

Category of manuscripts	Number
Editorial	4
Original Articles	159
Case reports	40
Special/ Brief Communication	14
Continuing Medical Education (CME)	3
Review Articles	8
Correspondence	8
Conference Proceeding	1
Book Review	1
Total	236

author claimed to have conducted the study in Jordan while the authors of manuscript published in Archives of Iranian Medicine mentioned that the study was conducted in Iran. Earlier we had come across a number of other cases of publication misconduct.³⁻⁸ In some instances, such cases were detected before publication, hence the publication of such manuscripts was withheld but sometimes this could not be detected in time. Hence as a policy we have so far black listed forty eight authors and co-authors during the last three years. It includes eleven authors from Pakistan, twenty eight authors and co-authors from Islamic Republic of Iran and seven authors and co-authors from India besides one author from Jordan and Palestine each. We hope that such an action will prove to be a deterrent for the authors and they won't indulge in unethical practices. We have not received any appeal for reconsideration of this decision so far. No manuscript from such authors will be accepted for the next five years. In case they send an appeal and ensure a good conduct in future, this period can be reduced to three years. Annals of Saudi Medicine also has a policy of black listing such authors for a period of five years and in some cases this period may also be reduced if the authors satisfy the editors of ethical conduct in future.⁹

Saudi Medical Journal has also reported frequent cases of duplication, plagiarism and divided publication. Their policy of handling such cases consists of warning to the authors, prompt rejection of submitted manuscripts,

publication of notice of redundant or duplication publication, notification to the head of the institution besides refusal to accept future submissions for two years.¹⁰

A study by Errami M et al¹¹ on duplicate citations in Medline reports that duplicate publication is not so easy to detect. National Library of Medicine (NLM) at NIH Bethesda defines a duplicate publication as "one that substantially duplicates another article without acknowledgment."¹¹ Till July 2006, NLM annotated 607 records in Medline as duplicate publications. Manual inspection of these 607 records which included 4089 abstracts was undertaken and 171(42%) of them were classified as true duplicate publications. The authors further observed that duplicate publications were predominantly in journals with no Impact Factor, and of those articles which are rarely cited. The authors thus concluded that duplicate publications are a persistent problem. Hence it is important that the journals should strictly enforce their submission and copy right protection policies. Reliance on undertaking given by authors regarding exclusive submission is not enough.¹²

Educating the authors

Though there has been some improvement but still most of the authors from the not so developed countries, Pakistan being no exception, need to be educated in the art of medical writing. Their education can help reduce the problems faced by the reviewers and the editors.¹³ Careless attitude of the authors continues to be a constant problem. Some of these problems which we still confront as regards authors are as under:

- * Almost over 60% of the authors do not submit Letter of Undertaking signed by all the authors along with the manuscript confirming exclusive submission and willingness to pay publication charges if their manuscript is approved for publication after peer review. They do so once they are reminded on receipt of their manuscript which naturally increases the workload

un-necessarily besides increasing the processing time.

- * Often the pictures are not submitted in JPEG format.
- * The manuscript in the CD is often different than the printed version or at times the CD accompanying the manuscript is either blank or contains virus.
- * Some authors do not bother to provide e-mail, phone and complete postal address for further communication.
- * The figures in the abstract, the body text and in tables do not tally.
- * Some authors do not know how to prepare figures in JPEG and GIF format.
- * Some authors do not check their e-mail for days and weeks with the result that they do not respond to queries and clarifications in time.
- * Some authors intentionally do not mention about willingness to pay publication charges in the "Letter of Undertaking" and they do so on being reminded.
- * Despite the fact that there is a set criteria for authorship, some of the authors keep on adding or changing the sequence of authorship in the manuscript till the last minute making un-necessary requests which at times have to be rejected.
- * Incomplete reference in which either the name of the journal, title or year of publication is missing is a common error. A little extra care on the part of the authors can save lot of botheration and time of the reviewers and editors.
- * Some of the authors do not know how to convey corrections in the PDF file sent for proof reading. Authors need to be educated that when they are asked to convey corrections to PDF file, they are not supposed to make additions and editing or changing the manuscript extensively which is not possible at this last stage of publication which results in un-necessary delay and disruption of publication schedule.
- * In some cases though the manuscript contains some useful information but the

English language needs lot of improvement or rewriting of the whole manuscript to ensure that the message is conveyed properly.

- * Some authors from Iran submit manuscripts which are either typed from right to left or the different columns in tables are not indented with the result that the whole information of different columns mixes up. In such cases at times it is difficult to follow and the authors have to be requested to re-submit the tables.
- * In certain cases the authors are so impatient that they desire immediate publication of their manuscript, show un-necessary haste.

Communication from the Higher Education Commission

The Higher Education Commission, Government of Pakistan has recently sent a communication to the Editors of all the medical journals which are recognized by HEC stating that if they issue an acceptance letter and that particular manuscript is not published in that particular issue, the respective journal will be de-listed. This adds additional responsibility on the shoulders of the Editors. Since some time the authors are not so efficient in the follow up procedure after getting an acceptance letter. They do not convey the corrections in time. Hence in order to meet the publication schedule the editors are left with no other choice but to go ahead with the publication after doing the proof reading themselves with the result that there is a possibility that some of the mistakes may not be corrected.

Processing charges

Since a large number of manuscripts are processed and not all of them are finally approved for publication, some of the journals have started asking for processing charges which are to be paid while submitting the manuscript. This is being done since each manuscript goes through the peer review process irrespective of the fact whether it is finally published or not and manuscript processing does involve

precious time of the reviewers and editors in addition to increased cost. However, for the time being we have not yet decided to ask for processing fee to be paid along with the manuscript for various reasons. We believe it will discourage some of the young researchers and beginners.

Changing frequency of publication

Last year we had planned to make Pakistan Journal of Medical Sciences bimonthly from 2008 to accommodate more manuscripts and reduce publication time in view of the manifold increase in the number of manuscripts being received. However, taking fresh stock of the situation, we have abandoned this plan for the time being for various reasons. Firstly the response and patronage from the pharmaceutical trade and industry which is the major source of generating revenue for the biomedical journals is not satisfactory. Secondly the on going political instability and deteriorating law and order situation in the country results in loss of many working days. Shortage of trained and experienced human resources due to financial constraints are some of the other reasons. However, this decision will be reviewed again at an appropriate time but in case the need is felt, just like 2007, we might decide to publish one or two additional issues apart from the scheduled four issues during 2008.

It is not only the authors alone but reviewers and the editors also need to be educated and trained. With this objective in view, we under the auspicious of Pakistan Medical Journalists Association (PMJA) in collaboration with Army Medical College (AMC), National University of Science and Technology (NUST) with the blessings of Higher Education Commission (HEC), Government of Pakistan organized the First National Conference on Medical Editing at Rawalpindi - Pakistan from April 22-25th 2007. Apart from eminent medical editors from Pakistan, over half a dozen guest faculty members, distinguished editors of medical journals from Iran, Saudi Arabia, WHO EMRO and

UAE were also invited to share their knowledge and experience. The meeting was very well attended by authors, editors, reviewers besides faculty members from various medical institutions from all over Pakistan. Proceedings of this conference have now been published.¹⁴ This 140-page booklet is an excellent source for authors, reviewers and editors. We are hopeful that all those interested will find it useful and it will go a long way in furthering our aims and objectives of promoting the art and science of medical writing, editing and the specialty of medical journalism in this part of the world.

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