

## PROCEEDINGS OF FIRST REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON MEDICAL JOURNALS IN THE WHO EMRO REGION HELD AT CAIRO EGYPT

*By Shaukat Ali Jawaid*

World Health Organization Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMRO) in collaboration with the Saudi Medical Journal organized the first Regional Conference on Medical Journals at Cairo, Egypt from October 7-9<sup>th</sup> 2003. Over sixty editors, publishers and staff members from the WHO EMRO attended it. Speaking in the inaugural session, Dr. Salah Baghdadi from Saudi Medical Journal said that SMJ was indexed in Medline in the Year 2000. We have established our own website. We also publish issues in Arabic not only for the physicians but also for public.

The Regional Director's message read in this session highlighted that there are over four hundred medical journals published by twenty-three countries in the EMRO region. WHO database shows 315 titles but there exist some more journals. While talking about these journals, the message said, there are many questions which need answers. These are:

- ☆ To what extent do the journals of the region reflect the health and biomedical research being conducted in the region?
- ☆ To what degree have these journals contributed to solving the health problems in

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the Region-How seriously do academic and professional institutions take medical journal publishing in terms of resources they assign to the journal, the status they accord and the care they put into their production or are the journals only regarded as vehicles for promotion?

- ☆ Do medical journals in the Region know where they are going and how to face the future of medical information dissemination?
- ☆ Has any one audited the situation of medical journal publishing in the Region-looking at quality, standards, distribution, funding, management and the role it plays in improving healthcare.

Highlighting the objectives of the conference, the message said that it is aimed at: -

- ☆ To review the current status of medical journal publishing in the Region.
- ☆ To assess the problems and constraints facing medical journals in the Region.
- ☆ To develop guidelines for quality of medical journal publishing in the Region.
- ☆ To develop and propose code of ethics for medical journal publishing in the Region.
- ☆ To analyze trends in journal publishing in the Region

The Regional Director also referred to the under-representation of regional medical journals

Note: Full text, or abstracts of the presentations made at the conference are being published by Saudi Medical Journal as a supplement. Saudi Med J 2004; Vol. 25 Supplement-1

in the international literature. An important reason for this is that these journals are hardly found outside their own institutions or their own countries at best. International services such as MEDLINE or the Science Citation Index cover a large number of journals but 95% of them are from the so-called First World and only 5% from the Third World. This is a starting point for the vicious circle affecting the Third World Medical literature. Libraries in general and medical libraries rarely stock journals that are not indexed, hence they are rarely cited by authors and thus rarely indexed. The Index Medicus for the EMRO region maintained by the Regional office is a tool to break this vicious circle. This Index currently covers three hundred fifteen journals with strong and visible presence on the Internet as well.

The participants elected Dr. Ahmad J. Jamal from Bahrain as the Chairman of the conference, Dr. Farhad Handjani from Iran as Vice Chairman while Dr. Maqbool H. Jafary from Pakistan was elected as the Rapporteur. The conference proceedings were then jointly conducted by these three elected office-bearers.

### **RESEARCH IN WHO EMRO REGION**

**Dr. Basim Yaqub** from Saudi Medical Journal delivered his keynote address on Research in the WHO EMRO Region: Where do we stand? Medical research, Dr. Basim Yaqub stated is becoming an important industry and it plays a very important role in the development of different aspects of society. The countries, which do not invest in research, become dependent on others. The main objectives of this research, he stated, are to promote teamwork, identify leadership in the society, establish "research personalities" among professionals who think in an evidence based manner which will affect decisions making, help the leadership in future planning and educate the society. Important medical research results in publications in different medical journals. A Meta analysis of publications in "PubMed" from different WHO EMRO countries showed that during the last ten years, the highest num-

ber of publications was from Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Pakistan. Many countries in Africa are ahead of countries in our region in publications. This calls for serious thought to make necessary corrections. Time has come to act and act strongly by producing respectable standard medical journals, which are indexed in Medline. At present very few journals are indexed and a few have their own website. We must also help and support medical universities to achieve their leadership role in the society. They need economic and administrative support. Continuing Dr. Basim Yaqub said that we must also establish national medical research centers in different countries with appropriate facilities. We have a rich history in medical advancement and research. We should have vision, the will and the commitment to keep it so not only at present but in future as well. Our objective, Dr. Basim Yaqub opined, must be to promote evidence based research. During the discussion it was stated that the real problems should be identified and we should try to find out how to solve them. Language and funding were the major problems. We must create research culture in our universities. Dr. Maqbool H. Jafary from Pakistan remarked that medical personnel in teaching institutions should take interest. We need academic leadership which should involve the medical students and postgraduates in research activities.

**Prof. Abdul Rahman Al-Abdul Aali** from King Abdul Aziz City for Science and Technology spoke about the experience of their institution which was established in 1977 for funding medical research in Saudi Arabia. He discussed in detail the mechanism of setting research priorities and constitution of specialized scientific groups. Six reviewers, he said, review each proposal for research grant. So far we have funded 1450 research projects of which four hundred were in medical field, which cost us 185 million Saudi Riyals. King Abdul Aziz City for Science and Technology, he said, puts much emphasis on research activity. The research scientists are encouraged to present their research in conferences. Refer-

ring to the Saudi Data Base, he said, ninety-one books were published from this research of which thirty-two were in medical field. Seven hundred thirty eight papers were published from this research of which 241 were in the field of medicine.

**Dr. Arash Etemadi** from Iran talked about the trends of publications in medical journals in Iran in the 1990s. It was pointed out that in 1995 there were fifty-six medical schools in Iran with 7979 faculty members. In 1991, Iran had seventeen medical journals approved from the Ministry of Health and this number increased to forty-five in the Year 2000. At present the number of journals published from Iran, which are approved by Ministry of Health, is sixty-nine. Most of these publications are in Persian. Total number of articles published in Iranian Medical Journals from 1990-1999 was 8615 of which 5122 were original papers. The number of original papers increased in this period from 127 to 1140. The number of review articles decreased from 40% to just 9% and case reports also declined from 18% to 10%. Two hundred seventy eight original articles were written by ten most published authors of whom 128 (46%) were published in journals with which the author had some kind of affiliation. From 1991 to 2000, a total of 2060 articles from Iranian researchers were cited in Medline.

Dr. Etemadi concluded that there has been a growth in the number of articles published in Iran. It can be attributed to increased research staff, publication-based evaluation system of faculty members and increased research facilities. The high proportion of articles published in journals in which the authors have some affiliation might show the lack of trust in peer review and publication process of other journals. Although there has been an increase in articles cited from Iran in Medline but we still lag behind many other countries, which shows our lack of international relations. Some of the problems that we face are that English articles go to international medical journals which are covered in Medline Ten people contributed 7% of the all research publications and most of these papers were published in their own jour-

nals. Though such published work does help get the authors promotions but not all published work is of good quality. In order to solicit the views of Iranian Medical Journal Editors, a meeting was called to discuss these issues. Only twenty-seven out of fifty one editors invited attended. Most of them were male. 50% of them had Ph.D degree. All the manuscripts published they pointed out are peer reviewed of which 54% were reviewed without any fee. In 26% of cases, two reviewers were used.

**Dr. Ahmad Said Mursi** discussed the issues and trends in Egyptian Medical Journals publishing. The first journal in Egypt " Bulletin of Society of Egypt" he said, was published in 1912. At present one hundred forty periodicals are published from Egypt of which eleven are registered having ISSN number. Nineteen publications have changed their title. Some of the problems that they face, he said, was lack of training courses for Editors, financial and language constraints, lack of communication between Editors and lack of peer review. He emphasized the importance for laying down some criteria for selecting and standardization of medical journals.

**Dr. Nada Al Ward** from Iraq highlighted the situation regarding publication of medical journals in Iraq. She opined that for people to read, one needs people who write. The first medical journal in Iraq, she said, was published in mid 20s. Until just before invasion by allied forces, Iraq had fourteen peer reviewed medical journals, which included Iraqi Medical Journal, The Military Medical Journal, Iraqi Journal of Community Medicine and specialty journals like the one devoted to cardio thoracic diseases, Journal of the College of Pharmacy, Journal of College of Dentistry and College of Nursing and Iraqi Journal of Medical Sciences. Iraqi Postgraduate Medical Journal is published by Iraqi Commission of Medical Specialties. Faculties of medical colleges publish some of these journals while a few are published by different hospitals. People mostly write to get promotion and once they get promotion, they do not feel the need to write hence they give up

writing. Currently interested part time enthusiastic people were looking after the Iraqi Medical Journal in medical publishing. A new Editorial Board was constituted. In mid 2001 it was decided to revive the Iraqi Medical Association and also upgrade the Iraqi Medical Journal. The new Editorial Board was carefully selected which included interested, part time, enthusiastic persons. The Editor-in-Chief received a three weeks training in BMJ Medical Journal publishing. Iraqi Medical Journal was established in 1953. It suffered set backs leading to the deterioration of its standard due to poor quality of articles published, editorial boards having limited technical abilities, poor quality of review, irregularity of publications and limited funds. We wanted to upgrade the journal. Two issues were published every year. To ensure publication, funds were secured from the Iraqi Medical Association. Other sources of funding were advertising, publishing fee and subscriptions. The voluntary team of workers consist of eight faculty members, two technical editors and two secretaries. One senior physician worked from home as an English language reviewer. A list of reviewers consisting of distinguished physicians and faculty members were compiled, scoring system was introduced to evaluate the reviewing capacity and timeliness of the reviewers. A standard criterion was set and distributed to the authors as well as the reviewers. Each manuscript is sent to three external reviewers. Once their report is received, it is summarized in a letter by editorial board and sent to the author. A revised and updated version is then published. Authors are supposed to send three hard copies along with a floppy diskette. The decision regarding sending a manuscript to the reviewers is taken in the weekly meeting.

After the War, the co-editor is working in the WHO office, one member of the Editorial Board has been appointed acting dean. Now no regular meetings of the editorial board are held. The secretarial staff has left for lack of security and low salaries. Our office which was located adjacent to a government office, was bombed and destroyed by allied forces. Iraqi Medical

Journal is currently homeless. We are understaffed and short of funds but we are ready to start the publication of Iraqi Medical Journal once again. All files and equipment were stored in editors and secretary's houses for safekeeping. The IMA has been dissolved soon after the War and elections for a new IMA have not been held so far. Two members of the editorial board left the country before the war and the editor-in-chief is attending a six-month training course in Canada.

During the discussion **Dr. Ahmad Jamal** remarked that we have financial constraints but it is said that most of the Arab World spends too much on Women and Wars but we do not support scientific research. Just look at the amount of money spent on various wars in this region during the last ten years, he asked? One of the participants from Iran said that various universities support Iranian Journals. Some of these journals are published by various medical centers but we do face problems in funding. Prof. Shuja Tahir from Pakistan said that while some journals have financial constraints, some have very few papers while others receive too many papers and have a long waiting list for publication. So why do not we collaborate and share our resources and manuscript so that the authors do not have to wait for too long. WHO EMRO officials offered to help Iraq to restart publication of their journal while Jordan, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia also promised to help them in publication of Iraqi Medical Journal. It was also announced that National Research Center in Saudi Arabia will also fund projects from other countries. For this the WHO regional office will finalize the evaluation criteria. Journals published in Persian in Iran, it was stated, do have an Abstract or Summary in English language. Since the authors are interested to get their work cited, medical journals should get their Journals indexed in Medline and other indexing services. These journals should also have their own websites, which is not so difficult to manage. Yet another suggestion put forward by the participants was that we should invite representatives from the National Library of Medicine to such meet-

ings and it will help increase the number of our medical journals indexed. Almost all the delegates mentioned shortage of funding. Saudi Medical Journal it was informed has started indexing journals within the region. There is no communication between journals. Often the authors do not mention studies done locally in their manuscripts. One of the participants pointed out that there are many other reasons why we do not have many journals from the EMRO region indexed in Medline apart from the good quality and it will be better if we apply as a group. WHO EMRO office was asked to help these journals get them included in MEDLINE. A delegate from Iran suggested that we must strengthen our own Index Medicus. We must set some standard and start citing our own work. It will improve the impact factor. There was also a suggestion to organize a workshop on Indexing where issues like better quality of manuscripts; better peer review system should be highlighted. It was also suggested that the WHO EMRO regional office should organize a series of workshops for Editors and some communication between editors should be ensured.

### TRENDS IN MEDICAL JOURNAL PUBLISHING

**Dr. Najib Al-Shorbaji** from the WHO EMRO Region gave details of EMR Survey of Medical Journal Editors, which was based on WAME questionnaire. A total to two hundred survey forms were distributed of which seventy-five were received back which is about 38%. The survey forms returned included 24 from Egypt, 17 from Pakistan, 9 from Saudi Arabia, 6 from Iran, 4 from Lebanon and three from Bahrain. The countries, which did not respond, included Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine, UAE, Somalia, and Tunisia etc. Of these fifty-two journals are registered with ISSN and twenty-one are not indexed anywhere. Twenty-eight of these journals publish more than one thousand copies. Data regarding the number of years these journals are being published showed that 29 are being published for the last 1-10 years, nine-

teen for 11-20 years, ten for 21-30 years, seven for 31-40 years, six for 41-50 years and only four are being published for more than fifty years. Most of these journals are well established. Five new medical journals are published in this region every year. Frequency of these publications which returned the survey forms is given in the accompanying table.

#### Frequency of medical & dental journals published from EMRO Region (n = 75)

- Twice a month	1
- Monthly	3
- Bi-monthly	5
- Three times a year	11
- Quarterly	33
- Twice a Year	17
- Yearly	5

Sixty-two of these journals are published in English, eight in Arabic, three in Persian and four in French. Acceptance rate is below 20% by 3 journals, 21-44% by four, 41-60% by twenty-four and 61-80% by twenty-six journals. Thirty-three of these journals are owned by the professional societies, two are commercially owned while twenty-five are owned by academic institutions. Out of these 75 journals, forty solicit articles, 68 publish new research, 64 also publish reviews and 43 also publish letters. Source of revenue for 32 journals is advertising, 28 generate income from subscription while twenty-four of these journals are totally funded by institutions. Seventeen journals receive contributions from authors, eight get grants and eight journals survive on fees from members while seven get donations. Sixty-six out of 75 journals from which the survey forms were received reported that they practice peer review. Seven said peer review has serious problems, 31 said they had no problems while thirty-seven said that they don't pay to the reviewers. Fifty-four journals said they use Editorial Board members as reviewers, 52 use reviewers within the country while thirty-seven said they use qualified reviewers in any country. Fifty-six journals reported that they

use external reviewers for original research while 22 said they use it for Reviews. Fifty-three journals have specific set of instructions for reviewers; ten communicate comments of other reviewers as well. Twenty-three journals said that they always require reviewers to disclose conflict of interest while seventeen said they do ask it some time. Sixty-three journals said they have never failed to publish the journal for lack of manuscripts.

Only nine of the journals that responded are indexed in Medline thirteen by EMBase (Excerpta Medica) while 35 are covered by WHO Index Medicus. Sixty-three journals have access to Internet. Forty of these journals have their own website. Sixty-six said they would welcome provision of training for newly appointed journal editors. Thirty-six journals said they were facing serious financial problems while thirty-three face technical problems. Forty journals said their most pressing problem was lack of quality manuscripts. Twenty-two journals reported lack of proper and quality peer review while twenty-seven mentioned lack of time available for authors, editors and reviewers.

**Dr. John Cathey** from Annals of Saudi Medicine spoke about factors related to changes in the quality and utilization of medical journals published in the Middle East. **Dr. Mahmood Ashraf Ibrahim** from Clinical Diabetes Journal, Middle East Edition spoke about diabetes publications in the Middle East. He listed various obstacles and said that we still lack of good database for subscribers.

During the discussion it was suggested that a discussion group between Editors of medical journals should be formed. Dr. Najib Shorbaji said that EMRO office of WHO will be too glad to do it. We are willing to train editors; we do it for nine countries. Medical Journals have been included as part of system. We have a proposal and some institutions have shown interest. To help Iraq, Saudi Medical Journal, it was stated has already agreed to train ten medical editors. Delegates from Saudi Medical Journal suggested holding a pre-conference three days annual training course for editors

along with the next conferences. Another suggestions put forward by the participants was to form a representative Association of Medical Journal Editors for which WHO should be asked to provide expertise and logistics. Dr. Sarwar J. Zuberi from Pakistan suggested that WHO should have a website for EMRO region which should contain full text articles of all the journals published from this region. Dr. Najeeb Shorbaji said that I wish WHO had so many resources to implement this suggestion. However, a list of all the journals is available on the WHO website. We index all those journals. We are trying to see if we can publish full text of journals if possible. All the online journals will have a connection. One of the participants felt that most of the medical editors are not aware of very basic things. They do not know much about medical publishing. Then the editors of these journals keep on changing, new people are not aware of basics. Hence it is important that they should be taught the basics of editing and for this purpose the WHO should organize regional scientific editors conferences. Most of the editors it was stated are working part time and only a few were paid and work fulltime, as many journals cannot afford to have full time editors. The need to have regular workshops for authors as well as medical editors in the region organized by WHO was highlighted by many participants.

**Dr. Hoomen Momen** from the Bulletin of the World Health Organization delivered his keynote lecture on equitable access to scientific and technical information in health. He pointed out that the internet and associated technologies has revolutionized the publication of academic journals and the opportunities presented by these technologies has lead to calls for greater access to the scientific literature. Open access movement believes that the cost of publishing scientific information should be borne by the provider and that access to the information should not be limited by the users ability to pay. He discussed in detail the financial sustainability of the journals and editorial cost of the journals that needs to be financed. Investment in new technology he stated has in-

creased the cost of publishing manifold. Private sector is considered more efficient as compared to public sector. Although open access has made impressive progress in recent years the scientific health literature is still dominated by commercial publishers and learned societies that follow a similar commercial model for the publication of their journals. These publishers own millions of pages of scientific and technical information of vital interest to those working in the health fields. It is argued that the State or the institutions should provide funds for publication of research. In a new development now authors put on their manuscripts on their own website or on institution websites. Commercial publishers have proven that they have efficient structure. There are strong basis for the use of new technologies to provide new services. He suggested flexible pricing. Those in the West have very little accesses to the literature from the developing countries, he added.

This was followed by an excellent presentation by **Dr. Farrokh Habibzadeh** from Iranian Journal of Medical Sciences who spoke on “How do developing countries succeed in biomedical journalism”? He pointed out that the developing countries have 80% of the world population but only 25% of the world’s scientists. The question often asked is whether the developed world need a medical journal from the developing world and some scientists in the West say that there is no science in the Third World countries. Practicing physicians in the developing Third World countries, he said, are faced with situations, which are far different from those encountered by practitioners in the developed world. Infectious diseases are still the major killers in the developing countries which have been completely eradicated from the West. The developed world is facing problems like cardiac diseases, cancer and cerebrovascular diseases etc. Hence this makes it imperative that the scientists in the developing Third World countries should work on these diseases and present their own findings. As such this also necessitates the publication of journals from the developing world. We

must concentrate on research on locally prevalent diseases rather than competing in the fields, which are well funded and are already under intensive research by the scientists in the West which will be a futile exercise and waste of funds. What we see in our countries is that too many journals are chasing a few manuscripts and funds. These journals have low submission rate, low visibility, low scientific value, low credibility of the authors hence have low chance of international indexing. Then we have certain language barriers. Shift in research centers gave importance to English language. Previously it used to be Greek and Latin or Arabic. Failure to attract good manuscripts and poor quality of Reviewers were some of the problems faced by the journals from the developing countries.

Solution to the above problems, Dr. Habibzadeh opined is in concentrating on geographic medicine. We must spend limited resources on few journals if the source of funding is the same. We must help potential authors in pre peer review of articles in scientific, English writing. We must have good functional editorial boards with young professionals able diligent young scientists rather than false authorities that just like titles but do very little work or have no time for such academic work. We must nurture future authors and update reviewers database regularly. Readership surveys should be conducted on regular basis. The journals must become visible through electronic journalism. We must have some exchange programme to share our knowledge and experience and find solutions to common problems. We must set goals and also set deadlines to achieve them, Dr. Habibzadeh remarked.

**Prof. Mohammad Al-Turaiki** in his presentation highlighted the Saudi experience in medical journal publishing. He was of the view that medical journal publishing in the Middle Eastern region deserves more attention of concerned professionals and authorities. Many countries in the region do not have their own medical journals. They do not have proper documentation; hence their research findings are never or seldom published. Unless medical

journal publishing is made strong in the region, we will be failing in projecting ourselves to the world in scientific research. Even our good research will go un-noticed unless it is published. Success of any journal, he stated, depends on its regular and timely publication and good quality of manuscripts which is only possible if researchers come forward and publish their research in these journals. A revolution is needed in medical journal publishing in the Region with more journals and finding new contributors by encouraging them to publish their work. Our journals must address the issues relevant to our region, they should target large audience and research results should be easily understood. Efforts should be made to overcome the phobia about writing. We must organize short-term courses on medical journal publishing. If need be we must employ language experts. Translators have a big role to play and we must ensure availability of our journals on the Internet. Periodic review of journal's quality should be encouraged. Quality of the journal should satisfy the listing criteria. Availability of full text journals on the Internet will ensure easy accessibility. The journals must encourage free registration on their websites and we must provide for a platform for interacting among the editors, he remarked.

**Mr. Sajjeev X. Antony** Technical Editor of Sultan Qaboos University Journal of Scientific Research from Oman illustrated some of the challenges faced by the editorial team of the peer reviewed medical journal in Oman. He discussed at length the problems, which they faced in peer review, editing and design and how they overcome these problems. The main challenges which they were facing, he said, include questionable quality of many papers received, the difficulties in finding good peer reviewers, lot of editing needed even after peer review, task of designing and executing high quality pages for both printing press and the internet. The PDF format, he said, can be used for printing as well as for Internet and this also eliminates the need for providing any re-prints to the authors. Dr. Abdel Moneim M. Aly former Executive Editor of Eastern Mediterra-

nean Health Journal discussed different aspects regarding quality of medical journals with special reference to the Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal highlighting scope and coverage, quality of contributors, quality of production and the editors.

**Dr. Farhad Handjani** Chief Editor of Journal of Medical Sciences of Shiraz University of Medical Sciences Iran discussed the obstacles in obtaining high quality research papers for publication. Scientific publications, he opined, is the most important parameters for measuring the overall scientific activity of a country. Iran has many medical schools and large pool of basic scientists and clinicians. In the recent years many studies have been done to determine the status of Iran's scientific contribution in the form of medical publications and they have shown many obstacles. These obstacles are related to researchers, governmental policies and local medical journal infrastructures. There is lack of interest and incentives for research and to publish, lack of time and proper organizational skills besides lack of inter-departmental collaboration, allocation of insufficient funds and resources for research and development by the government agencies, absence of formal courses on conducting research and scientific writing in the medical education. Curriculum, emphasis on promotional policies, which favour publications in cited international journals over local journals and lack of proper evaluation and monitoring of current local medical journals are all responsible for poor quality of research papers that are sent for publication. Editorial staff of the journals also lacks formal training and often functions on part time basis. Editorial boards are inactive and at times it meets just as a formality while peer review system has little incentive and is time consuming. In Iran the government spends just 0.4% on research. Often small universities have done better with little funds. Time has come that we should replace quantity of journals with high quality few but very good journals, he remarked.

**Prof. Hassan Bella** Chief Editor of Journal of Family and Community Medicine from



Saudi Arabia discussed the checklist for editors and reviewers to make decisions on papers more objective. He discussed in detail how to detect common errors and dissection of a paper. Bad research, he opined, is not only unethical but also dangerous and wasteful. Title of the manuscript, he stated, should be most comprehensive and specific. It should be neither too short nor too long. Do not go for dull title. The authors should not forget to mention inclusion and exclusion criteria. Methods used must be replicable to verify the results. The authors should not omit negative results for fear of rejection because such results do get published. Incorrect copying of published data, too many or too few references should be avoided. It is also observed that sometimes the authors include names of eminent people in acknowledgement just to give credibility and mislead the editorial review process. Hence it is advisable that before acknowledging any one, permission must be sought by the authors. Dr. Ahmad Abdou Executive Editor Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal discussed various aspects regarding quality of biomedical journals and said that comments of reviewers must be communicated to the authors whose papers have been rejected. Peer review, he felt, was most important. He commended the efforts of the over three hundred reviewers and said that we try not to overburden them. These reviewers are not paid and to have a statistician on the Editorial Board is a great privilege. During the discussion the need to reduce the number of journals published in every country was also discussed. It was pointed out that in Iran now medical writing and research methodology is taught to the postgraduates. Lebanon, it was said, has three dental schools and two of them publish their own dental journals. In some countries researchers are now forced to publish in the local journals. Mr. Shaukat Ali Jawaid from Pakistan Journal of Medicine Sciences pointed out that some of the authors do not mention the local studies done in their own countries or by their colleagues and it is not referred to. Structured abstract it was stated is a must and if an author cannot

write structured abstract, he cannot write the article.

**Dr. Sarwar J. Zuberi** from Pakistan said that Journal of Pakistan Medical Association publishes articles from medical students. We have students editor selected from the final year class who is assisted by a fourth year student as sub-editor. Some of the editors who are not trained lack recognition. Editors, she opined, should be aware of evidence based medicine and they should be given hands on training. Even in USA medical specialists are trained in writing, she remarked.

### ETHICS IN MEDICAL JOURNAL PUBLISHING

The next session of the conference was devoted to ethics of medical journal publishing so as to evolve a regional code of ethics for medical journals. **Dr. Diaa Rizk** from United Arab Emirates University was the first speaker who discussed self reported assessment of medical students and interns of unethical research. He pointed out that training in research ethics is minimum or lacking in our academia. Giving results of a cross sectional study which involved sixty senior students and twenty three interns, he said that 83 (94.3%) believed that research misconduct is wrong particularly failure to inform patients, academic fraud and plagiarism. 46 (52.3%) subjects felt that failure to give study participants detailed information about the research project before enlisting informed consent was considered the most unethical action. 73 (83%) respondents felt that they would not perform these activities. He suggested that teaching health facilities must develop methods and establish policies, codes for formal teaching of medical students and trainees in research and publication ethics rather than presuming that they will automatically and unconsciously learn these subjects.

**Prof. Shuja Tahir** from The Professional Medical Journal Pakistan said that meager allocations for health and research have hindered research activity in Pakistan. Though we have many dedicated scientists but the country was

becoming poorer and poorer every year. Medical journals face lot of constraints. We need to improve research quality, come up with new ideas and evolve financial strategies for funding the journals. He suggested a collaborative approach by passing on articles to other journals that do not get enough manuscripts. We must have excellent networking like having a reviewer's bank. Intellectual collaboration, he opined, will prove to be rewarding. We may think in our own language but can acquire better translators. He also suggested training workshops, study tours for the researchers, authors while libraries should be asked to subscribe to local journals.

### **PROBLEMS FACED BY EDITORS OF PEER REVIEWED MEDICAL JOURNALS**

**Mr. Shaukat Ali Jawaid** Publisher and Managing Editor of Pakistan Journal of Medical Sciences in his presentation highlighted the problems faced by Editors of peer reviewed medical journals. He discussed in detail:

- ☆ Problems related to authors and shortage of quality manuscripts.
- ☆ Poor quality of reviewers
- ☆ Problems with indexation in international indexing services particularly Medline.
- ☆ Problems related to duplicate submissions and authorship.
- ☆ Financial problems.

A vast majority of the authors, he said, do not read and follow instructions to authors published by almost every journal, which increases the workload of editors, reviewers and referees. Receipt of incomplete manuscript, difference in figures mentioned in manuscript, tables and abstract, poor quality of English, inappropriate statistical analysis, too old references, splitting the manuscript in many parts just to have more papers on the CV, eagerness on the part of authors to see their manuscript in print, putting pressure through the Pharma industry for speedy review and early acceptance, failure to provide letter of undertaking regard-

ing exclusive submission, delayed response to clarifications sought by the reviewers were all mentioned in detail which further delay the whole manuscript review process. Lack of interest by the Editorial Board Members, poor quality of manuscripts which does not help in indexing of the Journal in interracial indexing services particularly Medline were some other problems faced by the Editors of the peer reviewed medical journals. Editing a journal, he pointed out is a very stressful job and the editors have to work under lot of pressure. Most of the medical journals published from Pakistan, he stated, were not financially viable and depend on patronage of the pharmaceutical industry which in return has its own repercussions like the industry won't welcome any adverse comments about their products and might insist on publication of company sponsored clinical trials which otherwise after peer review won't merit publication. He also referred to the activities of Pakistan Medical Journalists Association (PMJA) which besides publishing two books on medical writing has been holding symposia, workshops on medical writing and Peer Review System for the last twelve years helping the authors, reviewers and referees besides editors of medical, dental journals.

He suggested that few lectures on medical writing and research methodology should be given to final year medical students in medical schools to introduce them to the art of medical writing. Seminars and workshops on medical writing and research methodology should be regularly organized. Specialty organizations should be asked to hold a special session on medical writing during their conferences. He also highlighted the need for training courses for Editors, reviewers and referees besides judicious use of the available limited resources.

### **E-HEALTH CODE OF ETHICS**

**Dr. Najeeb Al-Shorbaji** from WHO EMRO region was the next speaker who talked about E-Health Code of Ethics; publishing health information on the web. To begin his presenta-

tion he jokingly remarked that all idiots of the world have published on Internet. He suggested that one should be truthful and not deceptive about claims and efficacy, acknowledge the controversial issues which must be indicated. Easy to understand language should be used. When the website was last updated must be clearly mentioned. Informed consent should not be missed. We must respect users rights to determine and the website should clearly disclose if there are any potential risks to the users. Who is collecting the data and this data will be used on the website should be clearly mentioned. Patient's interest must be kept supreme and they must be protected by confidentiality. Keep the patients informed on e-mail healthcare and give clear instructions for follow up. All websites should have their own e-mail and do provide e-mail for feedback.

During the discussion it was pointed out that the editors must give feed back to the authors regarding processing of their manuscripts. We should not compromise on quality and by sharing our expertise, we should support collaborative efforts. Just few lectures will not be enough to teach medical ethics. Egypt, it was stated, has an updated professional code of medical ethics. Dr. S. J. Zuberi highlighted lack of communication between editors and said that WAME site is extremely helpful as a discussion forum. Cost effectiveness of e-publishing also prominently figured in the discussion. To ensure quality, lot of financial investment is involved and collaborating was not an easy task. However, having online editions of journals will increase their readership. Dr. Nada Al Ward said that in Iraq students are encouraged to present papers form local journals in weekly meetings. This also ensures increased readership. Material available on the Internet, it was stated was affecting the attitude of the doctors and patients regarding its use. Many a times when the patients come they already know their diagnosis. Dr. Najib Shorbaji said that we approve more education for the patients. Sometime ago it was suggested that WHO certification should be essential for health websites but this proposal did not ma-

terialize as it involves lot of personnel. In the days to come the printed version of journals will continue while the electronic version will improve. There is no competition between printed and electronic versions but they support and supplement each other. Printed versions of medical journals, it was made clear, will never die, hence there is no danger to printed format of the journals.

#### **FORUM FOR AFRICAN MEDICAL JOURNAL EDITORS(FAME)**

On third day of the conference the first session was devoted to promoting information disseminating through information technology. **Dr. KIA Pakravan** from Iran talked about implementation of e-journals; experiences and achievements. **Ms. Edith Certain** from WHO Headquarters spoke about FAME: Forum for African Medical Journal Editors, which was formed in September 2003. She pointed out that some African countries do not have a medical journal; hence they publish their research in other journals. Most of the African medical journals were started in late 80s. Fifty-three of these journals are owned by academia, six by commercial organizations while four have individual ownership. Reasons for irregular publication are financial problems. While twenty-five journals cannot ensure regular publication because of lack of funds, ten do have enough articles. These journals survive on different sources of funding though advertising is the main source of revenue. Most journals publish 60% of the articles they receive and rarely reject the manuscripts. The editors work with the authors to improve their manuscripts. Published manuscripts include original research, reviews and letters. 92% of the editors follow peer review system and 88% get reviewers within the country. For new research 91% of the journals invite external reviewers. Most of these African medical journals are rarely visible. Fifteen of these journals from Africa are indexed in Medline. In all twenty-seven African Medical Journals majority of which are from South Africa are indexed. 89%

of the Editors have access to Internet and 29% of the journals mostly from South Africa have their own website. 58% of the Editors have adequate editorial support. Fifteen of these Editors who were facing some problems were invited to a consultative meeting and workshop in Geneva in October 2002. Their journals had irregular publication and they were not visible. Their journals had no financial sustainability and the Editors, reviewers were inadequately trained. After that meeting the FAME (Forum for African Medical Journals Editors) was established with the objective to improve the quality of the medical journals so that they can get indexed in Medline. Training of reviewers, she stated, is very important. FAME also established Award for the best articles published in African Medical Journals and we are looking some one to fund it. We have chalked out a programme for training of the editors with reputed medical journals from the developed world i.e. BMJ, LANCET and JAMA. These journals have promised to help us with financial assistance. FAME Board of Trustees has been formed which is headed by Prof. Janes from Uganda as Chairman. Other office bearers include Vice Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer. BMJ sponsored a three days training course for these editors and a practical action plan was finalized. Speaking about the objectives of FAME, she said it want to promote vision, planning, action and modernization. FAME wishes to improve the editorial practices and it hopes to be an active association.

**Mr. Hatem Nour** and **Mrs. Nahed El-Shazly** from WHO EMRO spoke about EMR medical journals on the web and gave an overview of Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal electronic version.

#### **PROMOTING NETWORKING AMONG MEDICAL JOURNAL EDITORS**

In this session **Dr. Basel Atallah** Editor of JAMA Middle East edition spoke about translating medical journals into Arabic. He pointed out that there are sixty-four medical schools in

fourteen Arab countries who have 2,56,000 doctors. JAMA Middle East distributes 25,000 Copies in fourteen Arab countries since 1991 except in the French speaking countries. He also discussed its impact on local medical journals. Arabs, he said, are divided, marginalized and not integrated. There is no democracy in these countries and technology is obsolete. Contributions by the Arabs in the field of medical literature are occasional. As editors of secondary medical publications, we select our articles from already published original materials and our publications are not entitled to be listed in Index Medicus. The question of translating JAMA Middle East into Arabic has been raised since the license permits translation into Arabic. The number of Arab physicians is attractive for potential readership but those who know medicine in Arabic is very small. Most of our editorial board members who are distinguished physicians were not taught medicine in Arabic and would not accept the responsibility of editing manuscripts in Arabic. Some think it is not within their capabilities while some think it will be time consuming. Translating the journal into Arabic will also increase expenditures manifold. Maintaining quality and to ensure patronage from the Pharma industry will be difficult. JAMA has many editions in other languages, which are quite successful. He opined that shifting teaching of medicine and all other higher education into Arabic is the practical and right approach to fight underdevelopment in the Arab world. It is the Arab solidarity and co-operation rather than territorial chauvinism and false rivalry, which would bring development in the Arab world, he concluded.

**Dr. Kassim Sara** from WHO EMRO discussed Arabization of Health Sciences Network and highlighted the current issues, problems, trends and the role of the regional office.

#### **INDEX MEDICUS FOR EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN (IMEMR)**

**Dr. Najib Al-Shorbaji** gave details of EMR Virtual Health Sciences Library project and dis-

cussed development of training material and manuals, human resource development, library a document delivery services besides development of information management systems and tools. He disclosed that manual for editors and reviewers will be produced by the WHO EMRO office. Registration database has been developed which includes journals consortium, networking services, electronic publishing, and discussion groups listserv. He also highlighted weak science and technology publishing in the region, weak networking and information sharing through health sciences libraries and institutions. Since 1999 IMEMR has become current. The number of journals being covered has increased from seventy to three hundred twenty of which 234 are current and from the region which are being indexed. Five printed volumes were produced and since 1999 we have started publishing quarterly Bulletin. We use medical doctors for indexing. They were provided training in MeSH. Three doctors do each indexing. Five hundred copies of the Index are published and every journal and libraries of medical colleges are sent a copy of the Bulletin. CD is distributed on six monthly bases. Journals from this region contain about 12% research on local health issues that is why citation for these journals is very low. We do provide some assistance like printers and computers to the journals through the government of those countries, he remarked.

Speaking about the future plans; Dr. Najib Al-Shorbaji said that we hope to link IMEMR to US National Library of Medicine Index Medicus besides having digital copy and imaging of articles. He suggested that the journals must have functional editorial board. Other issues which need attention include identification and selection of peer reviewers, development of publishing policy, adherence to frequency of publishing, promoting journals to create a Home Page and Online editions besides training of authors and editors at the country level.

**Dr. S.A.H. Bokhari** Executive Editor PAKJOPCOD from Pakistan spoke about how to become a biomedical (dental) journalist.

## CONCLUDING SESSION

In the concluding session a Task Force was constituted. Its members include Dr. Ahmed J. Jamal Chairman of the conference from Bahrain, Dr. Farhad Handjani Vice Chairman of the conference from Islamic Republic of Iran, Dr. Maqbool H. Jafary, Rapporteur of the conference from Pakistan, Dr. Basim Yaqub conference organizer from Saudi Arabia, Dr. Ahmed Said El Morsy from Egypt and Ms. Jane Nicholson from WHO EMRO. It was agreed that Dr. Basim Yaqub would coordinate the function of this taskforce.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The conference finalized the following recommendations concerning member states as well the WHO.

### Member States

1. Training courses for editors of regional biomedical journals and reviewers of such journals should be conducted on a continuing basis at national and regional level.
2. Editors of regional medical journals should make efforts to fulfill the necessary criteria for inclusion in international indexing services and ensure that their journal is included in national and regional indexes.
3. A regional association of medical editors should be established, and the details developed by the coordination committee for the establishment of the Eastern Mediterranean Association of Medical Editors (EMAME) for presentation at the next conference.
4. Editors of regional medical Journals should support the coordination committee for the establishment of the Eastern Mediterranean Association of Medical Editors (EMAME) by providing ideas and relevant information and informing other editors of its ex-

istence and the outcome of this conference.

5. A second regional conference on medical journals should be held as soon as feasible and practical. (Dr. Basim Yaqub from Saudi Medical Journal offered to host the next conference in Riyadh Saudi Arabia in November 2004 which was accepted. The exact dates will be finalized later).
6. Editors of regional medical journals should exchange existing training materials on medical editing and peer review through the facility of the EMRO portal so that national courses can be developed and/or enhanced.
7. Editors of regional medical journals should develop, as a minimum, a web page for their journal in order to ensure journal details are available for capture on the Internet. Efforts should then be made to develop their websites as resources permit.

### **World Health Organization**

8. The WHO Regional Office should support national and regional training activities for editors and reviewers of regional biomedical journals.
9. The Regional Office should facilitate the improvement of regional representation in international indexing services through liaison with the services concerned.
10. The Regional Office should create a listserv for medical editors in the Region to exchange information.
11. The Regional Office should establish a portal for regional biomedical journals and a directory of regional medical editors to enhance exchange of information in the Region.
12. The Regional Office should facilitate the exchange and gift programmes between medical journals and libraries in the Region.