Role of Medical Journals in Health Development

Professional of current knowledge and state of the art of practitioners of medicine. These journals also provide a platform for original contributions toward new knowledge in the various fields of health sciences. Medical authors contribute to new knowledge or to modifying existing knowledge through original research, techniques, case reports and letters to editors. Some writers focus on interpretation of existing knowledge in a new way through review articles, meta-analysis and editorials. Current literature emphasizes the need for continuing education, re-certification of doctors and evidence based practice. Local journals from the developing world should take an important role to enhance this process in the context of respective countries.

Peer reviewed indexed journals accept or reject scientific papers on the basis of importance of the issue studied, originality, testing of actual hypothesis, possibility of an alternative method to study the same problem, sample size, adequacy of control, appropriateness of statistical application and justification of conclusions.¹ In a similar way even qualitative studies come under scrutiny based on criteria from social science methodology. Methodological triangulation is one way of justifying conclusions. Review articles are usually written by authors with proven expertise in the subject with appropriate list of references usually exceeding 2 pages. In order to fulfill these functions medical editors and writers should strengthen the quality of papers through rigorous peer review process and strive towards indexing the journals in the global network, so that contributions of local doctors could come under global scrutiny to be of value as real contribution to new knowledge.

Some publications are used as key performance indicators for selection to clinical and academic posts in universities and research institutions. Developing countries should have at least one professional journal in medicine, which could be indexed. One of the problems in getting papers of high quality has been multiplication of medical journals by individual groups and institutions without collective wisdom. If this trend continues, the value of the medical journals will be no more than high school student magazines of individual schools.

In many reputed institutes criteria for judgement of academic performance has gone beyond mere number of publications to number of citations of publications by other authors in reputed journals which can be easily traced via Internet. With the advent of electronic publishing revolution the process of writing scientific papers has changed. The British Medical Journal is in the process of reader surveys to strengthen the electronic version of scientific papers and modify the written paper-part to summarized versions with better readability, compromising appraisability which is better achieved in the electronic version.

Journals should also take a new role in advocacy for health in development. Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen² considers enhancement of health as a constitutive part of development. He goes on to say that major health improvements can be achieved through using available resources in a socially productive way. Since health care is a labour-intensive process, low-wage economies have a relative advantage inputting more on health care. The recent World Health Report³ also includes two new dimensions to the traditional indices of health ie: responsiveness and fairness in financing.

In summary, there is a need for professional associations, and academic institutions in Health Sciences to look beyond interests of individual specialties and institutions to initiate dialogue towards a sustainable

journal of high quality in medical sciences which will be of real scientific and practical value both in local and global contexts.

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