

Proceedings of Workshops on Medical Editing and Peer Review held at NICH and DUHS in Karachi, Pakistan

Shaukat Ali Jawaid

Pakistan Medical Journalists Association (PMJA) in collaboration with Eastern Mediterranean Association of Medical Editors (EMAME) has planned to organize a series of workshops on Medical Editing and Peer Review for the training of Medical Editors, Reviewers and Referees in different parts of Pakistan. The first workshop in this series was held at National Institute of Child Health, Karachi on June 14th 2008. It attracted Editors, Associate and Assistant Editors of a large number of medical and dental journals published from Karachi, some experienced reviewers besides a medical librarian. A few selected postgraduates were also invited. Salient feature of the workshop included a highly interactive discussion in which most of the participants actively participated.

Prof. A. Ghaffar Nagi, Director of NICH was the chief guest in the inaugural session at the workshop held at NICH. He pointed out that we do have lot of data but since most of the faculty members are not trained in medical writing and medical editing, it never gets printed. The situation is improving. Now faculty members as well as the postgraduates are writing papers but in some cases quality is not so good. They need to be educated how to improve the quality of their manuscripts and they also need to know about medical editing.

Prof. Major Gen. (Retd) M. Aslam President of PMJA in his presentation discussed in detail the aims and objectives of the PMJA and also talked about its accomplishments so far. He specially referred to the most successful First National Conference on Medical Editing held

at Army Medical College Rawalpindi in April 2007.

Dr. Maqbool H. Jafary Vice President of EMAME highlighted the aims and objectives of the workshop. He pointed out that most of our editors have learnt the art of editing on the job as none of them has any formal training. The need was felt to organize some workshops for the training of Editors as well as reviewers since long. PMJA has been doing its best in this field for the last couple of years which culminated in the form of the First National Conference on Medical Editing held in April 2007. This is the first in the series of twelve workshops which PMJA intends to organize all over the country.

Mr. Shaukat Ali Jawaid Managing Editor Pakistan Journal of Medical Sciences first highlighted some useful tips in medical editing. He pointed out that never start a new sentence with figures. Single digit number in the manuscript should always be typed in words to avoid the chances of mix up with references. While writing number of patients and percentage, write the number in words and the percentage in bracket. While writing references follow ICMJE guidelines and list first six authors followed by et al.

Another mistake most often committed by the authors as well as by some editors is that they mix up Material and Methods, Patients and Methods and Subjects and Methods. Hence to overcome this problem the latest practice is that all these are replaced with the word Methodology which covers them all. Make sure that all references are written in superscript and after full stop. Latest references are always preferred and the references should also be marked in the manuscript as 1, 2, and 3 and so on and at the end in the same order and not by the name of authors. Brevity is the beauty of writing. Since there is lot of pressure on

Correspondence:

Shaukat Ali Jawaid
Managing Editor
Pakistan Journal of Medical Sciences
Karachi, Pakistan.
E mail: pjms@pjms.com.pk
pulse@pulsepakistan.com

limited space available, with little care, the message can be conveyed by remaining within the acceptable limits. He also gave some examples. Tables and illustrations must have proper foot notes and headings. Check the total in abstract and tables and also ensure that the structured abstract is in four headings like objective, methodology, results, conclusions and appropriate key words. Some people also use Background instead of objective but most often the information in the background can be shifted to introduction, he added.

Next part of his presentation related to the Editors and their functions. He opined that at times categorization of the manuscripts is a problem since some manuscripts do not fit into the well established categories. Such manuscripts have to be adjusted as Short Communications, Clinical Updates, and Clinical Case Series or accommodated in the correspondence section. Giving details of policy decisions regarding length of manuscripts which are accepted for publication in Pakistan Journal of Medical Sciences, he said that the length of an Editorial can be seven hundred fifty plus words. An original article can be up to 2500 words; Reviews can have up to 3500 words while most other categories can be up to 1500 words. Talking about Editorial he was of the view that a large number of medical journals carry manuscripts entitled as Editorial which is mere "*Gup Shup*" and this does not fit into Editorial. If there are some changes in publication policy or the editor wish to say something to the readers in lighter vein, it can be Note from the Editor or Publisher's note while an Editorial should be on any topic of current interest or based on the observations in a paper being published in that particular issue. It must be properly referenced. Dr. Maqbool H. Jafary participating in the discussion supported this view point and stated that ideally an editorial should cover an important scientific aspect and it must have proper references.

Prof. Manzar Salim participating in the discussion opined that an Editorial can be written on non-scientific issue as well. However, after lot of debate it was agreed that ideally an editorial should be on a scientific topic with

proper references. As regards references, it was highlighted that an editorial can have up to five references, ten to fifteen latest relevant references are good enough for an original article while a Review can have thirty plus references. A multicenter study with Meta analysis can have much more references. Letters and short communications can have from two to five references but the emphasis should always remain on latest references.

Again there was lot of debate on Authorship. Mr. Shaukat Ali Jawaid referred to the authorship criteria laid down by ICMJE in its guidelines but actually what happens is that either the authors are not fully aware of this or they intentionally do not follow it. Hence many of the names listed as authors in the manuscripts in fact have no input. It is difficult for the Editors and they have to accept the decision of authors. It is not uncommon to receive requests for change in authorship order, include or exclude an author at later stages when the manuscript is under process or under publication. Prof. Manzar Salim pointed out that he has seen some papers in surgery or obstetrics and gynaecology wherein some of the authors are listed from department of biochemistry or other basic sciences who have nothing to do with them. Such unethical practices need to be checked. Prof. Maj.Gen. Aslam opined that now basic sciences are being integrated with clinical sciences from the very beginning hence there is no harm with such authorship but of course these authors must have some contribution in such studies. Dr. Fatema Jawad, Dr. Najeeb Ansari and Dr. Shams Nadeem Alam also gave their input on this issue. This issue generated lot of discussion and eventually it was agreed that the authorship guidelines by ICMJE should be followed and only those who have some intellectual, meaningful contribution in the conduct of study or writing of the manuscript should be authors irrespective of their departmental affiliations.

Mr. Shaukat Ali Jawaid also pointed out that some Editors of medical journals in Pakistan have started sharing information regarding authors which are being black listed because of publication misconduct or not adhering to

publication ethics. Hence, those involved in such unethical practices must know that if caught, they may not find space in most of the journals in Pakistan. Higher Education Commission, he said, is providing facility to scan manuscripts for plagiarism to HEC recognized journals and they provide the report within a day or two. Hence it is much easier to detect plagiarism. He also disclosed that PMJA is working on a project to have a Certificate Course in Medical Editing which will be based on lectures, reading material, on the job training and affiliation with some good quality journals which practice peer review.

Problems faced with the reviewers also came under discussion. It was stated that sometimes the reviewers comment that "the manuscript does not add anything new to the medical literature" has to be looked at carefully. May be it has some local or regional data which is quite important, hence before rejecting these manuscripts, the editors should have another look which may help in some of these write-ups being accepted for publication.

Yet another important issue which Mr. Shaukat Ali Jawaaid raised was regarding publication of manuscripts by the editors in their own journals. Opinion of the house and editors present was sought. There was lot of useful discussion. Dr. Jamshed Akhtar, Prof. Nazeer Khan, Dr. Saba Sohail, Prof. Sohail Akhtar, Dr. Salahuddin, Dr. Farah Asad Mansuri, Prof. M. Aslam, Dr. Maqbool H. Jafary and few others actively participated in the debate. The practice by various journals also came under discussion while some of the participants talked about advantages and disadvantages of such a practice. Eventually it was agreed that there was no harm in publishing in one's own journal provided these write-ups go through the routine peer review process. While reviewing a manuscript the reviewer, it was stated, should ensure that the manuscript has all the essential components, have a careful look at the references. Other issues to be looked into include ethical clearance, conflict of interest and the length of the manuscript. In case the manuscript needs to be looked at by a statistician, the reviewer should convey it

to the Editor and in some cases the reviewer might need help and assistance from some sub-specialty consultants. There is no harm in it and it can be acknowledged while sending the report to the Editor.

Later the participants were divided into two groups and they were given an original article for review. Though the time given was too short but even then the group leaders in their presentations covered most of the important deficiencies. Then Mr. Shaukat Ali Jawaaid shared the comments of the reviewers with the participants and how these manuscripts were revised more than once before they were accepted for publication.

Dr. Fatema Jawad Chief Editor Journal of Pakistan Medical Association first made a brief presentation on the art and science of plagiarism. Plagiarism, in Latin, she said means to kidnap. Plagiarism is defined as "the action of using or copying someone else's idea or work and pretending that you thought of it or created it". Another definition says "to take words, idea, etc., from someone else's work and use them in one's own work without admitting one has done so". Yet another definition is "To steal and pass off as one's own the ideas or words of another without crediting the source, to commit literary theft and to present as new and original an idea or product derived from an existing source". According to Pechenik (2001), Plagiarism is one of the most serious crimes in academia.

Continuing Dr. Fatema Jawad opined that every one cannot plagiarize. It requires certain qualities. The author has to be clever and an expert in stealing. He should be a big deceiver, he should be an expert liar or otherwise he should be totally ignorant, performing the act without realizing that it is a crime. The plagiarizer, she stated, has to have the basic knowledge of how to present others work as one's own, should know about the various techniques involved in stealing ideas or writing and should be an expert with the computer and internet.

During the discussion Prof. Sohail Akhtar pointed out that he made a presentation at a conference but did not write up and it was not

published either though it was covered in the conference abstract booklet. Later on some one else published the work stealing my idea. Can it be included in plagiarism? He was told that unless someone has published his/her work which can be referred to, others can and will keep on stealing such ideas. Dr. Maqbool H. Jafary opined that it is often said that if it is not published, it did not happen. He advised the participants to make sure that they must publish their work as soon as they complete a study. Another participant said that they have learnt a lesson not to make a presentation unless the work is published or is under publication.

Talking about the basic cause of plagiarism Dr. Fatema Jawad mentioned laziness, lack of time, ambitiousness, pressure to publish, easy availability of computer and internet, deficient ability to write, not having a good command on English and possessing low ethical standards. The types of plagiarism include Word for Word, Mosaic, Paraphrase, ideas, authorship, self, salami slicing and cyber. She discussed all of these with guidelines and how to avoid them. She concluded her presentation by giving some recommendations. Plagiarism of any form, she said, is unethical and unacceptable. It is crime. Dr. Fatema Jawad was of the view that every journal must have a definite policy against plagiarism which must be available on their website. Every journal should have a plagiarism committee headed by the Editor to take decisions on such cases. Ideally every journal must have some software handy to use to detect plagiarism.

SECOND WORKSHOP

Prof. Masood Hameed, Vice Chancellor of Dow University of Health Sciences was the chief guest at the workshop organized at Professional Development Center in DUHS on July 9th which was attended by forty two participants.

The facilitators included Dr. Maqbool H. Jafary Vice President of EMAME, Dr. Fatima Jawad Chief Editor JPMA, Mr. Shaukat Ali Jawaid Managing Editor Pakistan Journal of Medical Sciences, Dr. Jamshed Akhtar Man-

aging Editor Journal of Surgery Pakistan, Dr. Masood Jawaid Assistant Editor Pakistan Journal of Medical Sciences, Prof. Nazeer Khan Editor Journal of DUHS and Prof. Manzar Salim Chief Editor Pakistan Journal of Surgery.

In his speech Prof. Masood Hameed said that Pakistan has the best clinical material and faculty members but there is a missing link that of mindset. That is why we remain far behind from our neighbouring countries as regards our contribution to medical literature. Prof. Masood Hameed also referred to the lack of facilities and felt that we need to provide all the facilities and training to our researchers. Lot of developments have taken place in the field of academic medicine in the country during the last couple of years. Now it has become a must for all the faculty members to publish their research work. He commended the contributions of Pakistan Medical Journalists Association in the field of medical journalism.

Dr. Fatema Jawad Chief Editor JPMA discussed the format of an original article. It contains original research work. The structured abstract, she said, should contain objective, methodology, results and conclusions with appropriate key words and it should not be more than 150 words. Make sure that the sample size is appropriate and do consult statistician for statistical analysis. Introduction should be brief and to the point, methodology should give all the details so that it can be replicated. Do not repeat the information given in the tables in text except some highlights. Most of the references come in Discussion in which the study results are compared with other similar studies. Negative and positive findings both are important, she added.

Mr. Shaukat Ali Jawaid highlighted the salient features of the final check list before submitting the manuscript for publication. He also briefly discussed some basic tips in medical editing. This handout along with some other useful informative material was also distributed among the participants.

Dr. Jamshed Akhtar discussed the processing, peer review and editing of an article "Typhoid Ileal Perforation", which was named as a Surgical Audit. He was of the view that it

is important as to who can write an audit. The manuscript in question was not an audit in the real sense. It had numerous flaws. The participants were divided into five groups and they all discussed this manuscript in detail and then the group representatives made their presentations. They identified most of the deficiencies and felt that it should be returned to the authors for revision.

During the interactive discussion it was pointed out that one should always ensure that references are latest after literature search. It is the quality and not quantity which matters. Peer review takes some time and the authors have to be patient. One of the participants felt that the reviewer should do the job in two weeks time which many felt was not appropriate. Problems with the selection of reviewers, quality of review, open vs. blind peer review, their merits and demerits all came under discussion. Mr. Shaukat Ali Jawaid pointed out that we in Pakistan Journal of Medical Sciences practice open peer review and there has been lot of debate on this among the editors. It is felt that open peer review does help in improving the quality of reviews.

Dr. Masood Jawaid Assistant Editor Pakistan Journal of Medical Sciences talked about Electric Long Paper Short (ELPS) version of manuscripts. This ELPS, he said, offers many advantages. It is economical and also reduces the publication time. However, it has the problem that it will require more editorial staff, other technical manpower, the editors will have to prepare and edit two versions of the same manuscript and so on. ELPS also offers the advantage of adding sound, videos of various operative procedures. However, keeping in view of peculiar circumstances and economic constraints in most of the developing countries including Pakistan, the solution lies in benefiting from both ELPS as well as printed version, he added.

Mr. Shaukat Ali Jawaid pointed out that we must know what are the latest developments in the field of medical journalism but adopt only those which are feasible and practical remaining within our resources. In Pakistan, he

said, practicing ELPS does not seem to be feasible in the near future. However, institutions which have enough resources can take the initiative if possible.

Prof. Nazeer Khan Editor JDUHS talked about the peer review system practiced at the Journal of Dow University of Health Sciences. We practice blind peer review system, he stated. Those manuscripts which are rejected, final decision on them is taken in the editorial board meeting which takes place every four months. During the discussion it was pointed out that it was not fair to the authors to keep them waiting for too long. Hence, this time period must be reduced as much as possible.

Prof. Manzar Salim acted as the moderator in the session devoted to discussion. Once again the peer review system practiced by various journals, selection of reviewers, and quality of reviews were discussed and debated. It was also pointed out that the manuscript based on M. Phil Thesis or FCPS Dissertation does not guarantee automatic acceptance. Manuscript for publication has to meet the clearly laid down criteria set by various journals and it is the Editors who have to take the final decision. The reviewers do help the editor in improving the quality of the manuscripts, guide the authors but eventually it is the responsibility of the Editors whether they accept or reject the manuscript. Too old studies are never accepted; hence efforts should be made by the authors to get their research published within five to six years period. Approval of research protocol, final manuscripts by the Ethics Committees and Institution Review Boards, their composition also came under discussion. It was stated that usually the Editors do not ask for certificate of Ethics Committee approval and trust the author's statement regarding such approval. However, the authors must not betray their trust and in future provision of ethics committee approval letter might also become mandatory. In reply to another question it was stated that retrospective studies are as useful as prospective and no journal will refuse to publish retrospective studies.