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## Editorial

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### What ails the Medical Research Publications in India?

It was in 1990 that the director of a hospital expressed concern regarding the low output of medical research from India and the issue was addressed at length by an eminent neurosurgeon. That was two decades ago. Encouraged by a positive note in an editorial expressing the recent rapid extension in quantity of educational research, and out of curiosity, I tried to have a cursory glance at the progress since that time.

The publication share and scientific activity of India in the global scenario has been reported to be on the rise; it is growing at an average rate of 7.76% per annum. India has improved its global scientific publication share amongst developing countries from 1.86% to 2.11 % but still ranks 12th in the table of 20 countries. At this juncture it is pertinent to mention that in the world context, India's national publications share in physical sciences, life sciences, and engineering sciences each has been above the global average in each discipline but in health sciences its share has been below the global average. Encouraging, but not substantial if one takes into account its population, the abundance of clinical material, ever increasing number of medical schools and number of graduates and post graduates qualifying every year. There are immense opportunities which need to be explored to carry out more and more number of researches and publication.

Amongst the many reasons responsible for the grim picture, inadequate infrastructure and staff, poor accessibility to funds earmarked for research, poor administrative support, lack of formal training in research methodology and bio-ethics, poor expression capabilities and unenthusiastic attitude of the doctors and the resultant low self-esteem, are probably the topmost.

The path of research and research publication is not rosy. Inadequate infrastructure and funds are commonly cited reasons for the poor research figures. Honest, dedicated team of workers who can devote their time and commitment are also essential. In India, the overwhelming figures of patient load dictates that healthcare take preference over research, and it is not perceived as a possible career opportunity by many. Simultaneously, research can also not be pursued as a part-time hobby either. Institutions do not give high priority to research activities.

Research ethics is another matter of concern. Researchers in India do not give due consideration to all the ethical aspects of research and publication. Thesis writing is an essential part of postgraduate curriculum. But at many medical colleges, this aspect of postgraduate training is taken as an unavoidable compulsion and not properly practiced. Thus, the student is not exposed to proper research methodology right from the beginning of his career. Importance of research planning and protocol writing is not stressed upon, and most of the students find an easy way out by procuring a readymade protocol for their thesis work. Every year multiple conferences are held for each specialty in the country wherein a multitude of papers are presented.

But only a small fraction of such presented papers find their way into published literature. The reasons could be apathy of the researchers towards publication or poor quality of research papers being presented at such conferences that do not merit publication in peer-reviewed journals.

Government organizations like Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), Department of Science and Technology (DST) and Department of Biotechnology (DBT), etc. are prepared to fund the appropriate research. In fact, the Government of India has set up a separate department of Health Research and has appointed a medical man as its Secretary, which is an achievement in itself. Despite various channels put in place the young scientists find it difficult to obtain the funds. Red tape, complex mandatory requirements, ignorance and almost zero percolation of the schemes to the grass-root level act as dampeners to access of funds that are aplenty. Recently, some agencies have come forward with readiness to help, guide and overcome the obligatory hurdles in getting the grants, but this too demand lot of time and effort and money in making a proper application. Growing institutions/ universities do not want to be left behind and try copying the good policies of the established ones in allocation of award in cash or kind to their faculties who wish to publish and prosper. At the same time, they make the guidelines so stringent and unrealistic that only few among many qualify to achieve. One has to overlook minor deficiency in the beginning to promote the policy for encouragement of publication.

Recently, guidelines have been laid down linking personal promotions with research publications. This may have reinforced the idea of 'publish or perish' in the minds of the young researchers. The result is that there has been a sudden spurt in the quantity of published literature but quality still remains to be achieved. The 'rush' to publish has lead to further dilution of quality. The 'myth of numbers' should be dispelled and quality research should be encouraged and preferred.

Being a vast and diverse multi-lingual country, not all students being admitted to medical courses are from the English medium background. Language and expression is a big barrier to publication. As a result, people who have the capacity to do research and present the results are not excelling. While countries like China, Turkey, Germany and Iran have medical publications in their local languages, India still uses English for imparting medical education and also for publications.

Everyone has a potential to write as there are no special skills, certificates or diplomas required for publishing. It's imperative to place one's work before the scientific community for appraisal. At the same time we have to overcome the steadily increasing pressure to publish as evidence of an individual's performance. Also, the editorial boards need to discharge their duty of improving the quality of standards of articles published in biomedical journals and find a way to increase the low rates of internationally published articles. After all, 'publication' is a widely accepted indicator of performance in any academic field, especially science

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