
Letter to the Editor

Improving the Quality of Pakistani Medical Journals: Another Perspective

Madam, It is encouraging that editors of medical journals in Pakistan are becoming concerned with the need for improvement in the quality of their journals.¹ The measures suggested by author are excellent ways of expanding the readership, bringing greater recognition and promoting manuscripts contributions from a larger, more diverse research community, both in terms of geography and area of expertise, making an impact on the journals' quality.

A journal's quality however, is largely determined by the quality of manuscripts published in it. Strategies referenced above can indeed help, but notable improvements only come from improvements in the quality of submitted articles themselves. Admittedly, the quality of articles depends primarily on the academic qualifications and training of the contributing investigators and the quality of the presented research itself; it is not that journals are helpless in making their contributors improve the quality of their writing.

The question of improving the quality of published articles in medical journals is not unique to Pakistan. During 1990s, these concerns lead to global efforts by scientific community culminating in the development of the "CONsolidated Standards Of Reporting Trials" (CONSORT); the standard guidelines for reporting results from interventional studies.² CONSORT (<http://www.consort-statement.org/>) has since been adopted by most well-recognized medical journals in the world, and the empirical evidence suggests that its adoption has resulted in significant improvement in reporting of clinical trials.³ The broad acceptability and success of CONSORT has prompted another international group of epidemiologists, statisticians, and journal editors, that is currently developing "Strengthening the Reporting of Observational studies in Epidemiology" or the STROBE (www.strobe-statement.org) Statement⁴ with hopes that it

will do for the observational epidemiologic studies, what CONSORT did for randomized trials.

Incomplete and inadequate reporting of research in the medical literature hampers the appropriate interpretation of research findings, complicating the practice of evidence-based medicine.⁵ In Pakistan and similar developing countries where clinical research/epidemiology is a relatively new discipline, this problem is even more serious. Since most original research articles in Pakistani medical journals originate from observational studies, journals requirement that authors adhere to CONSORT, and particularly STROBE, can bring a quick and substantial improvement in quality of manuscripts.

Making their requirements consistent with other international journals, Pakistani journals can improve their international acceptability and also better enable their readers to understand the conduct and gauge the validity of published research.

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