

RIGHT PATH OF PUBLISHING A SCIENTIFIC PAPER TO A RIGHT JOURNAL: Academic paper based case study

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ABSTRACT

Publishing of scientific manuscript in a peer reviewed bio-medical journal is an important ingredient of research along with a career enhancing advantages and significant amount of personal satisfaction. Scientific publications are golden eggs of an academic life and disseminate knowledge. These encourage discussion within the professional community and develop the scholarly base. The road to publication often seems complicated for newer authors. Therefore, the current academic based case study describes the right path of publishing a scientific manuscript in a right journal. This paper describes the experience and discusses the schooling that was learnt from the process of rejection and finally getting a paper into publication. A case study approach was adopted to facilitate the readers to understand the different influences on getting their paper in print. The present case of an academic study demonstrates that getting into print of a paper depends on a wide range of factors including the built-in importance of the research work, quality of the written text and selection of the appropriate academic journal.

KEY WORDS: Scientific Manuscript Writing, Medical Journal, Publication.

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INTRODUCTION

Scientific writing and publication is important in developing the scholarly base for medical science and scientists and fundamental component of an academic career. Scientific writing can be both professionally and financially rewarding. A healthy scientific environment is the prerequisite of scientific progress.¹

There are mechanisms, expressed as standards and assessment tools, which are used to monitor, regulate and maintain a healthy state of scientific production. Most of these mechanisms have been devised in developed countries where there is high scientific output.

The present study of an academic paper with methodological approach offer a real picture of the experience gained during the rejection and finally publication of the manuscript. Thus, examining such studies and experience may offer a better understanding of the publication problems and helps in the development of wide ranging hypotheses. The present study is not deliberate to provide perfect direction for acceptance and publications of a manuscript but provides better ideas and supportive discussion about the problems surrounding the practice of acceptance and getting published. Additionally, with best of our knowledge, limited number of references are available to discuss the experience that how one may come across a right path of publishing a paper in a right

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journal. Keeping in view all the above facts, the aim was to disseminate our findings and discuss the experience about a right path of publishing a paper in a right journal for the benefit of researchers.

CASE REPORT

In December 2005, the International Journal of Occupational Medicine & Environmental Health (IJOMEH) published our paper [Lung function in non-smoking wheat flour mill workers]. The idea behind this paper was to reveal the experience and discuss the schooling that was learnt about the process of rejection and acceptance of the manuscript into a print.

The practice of getting a paper into print:

First Phase: The manuscript was written following the journal's guidelines and submitted in the Journal of the Pakistan Dental Association on January 12, 2003; reply was received from the editorial office dated February 2, 2003. The manuscript was rejected with comments that the subject would not be of interest to our readers who are mainly general practitioners and specialists related with oral and dental sciences. Therefore, they regretfully returned our manuscript and suggested that we may submit the manuscript in a journal related to the subject. The most probable reason for rejection of the manuscript was the selection of in-appropriate journal therefore; the manuscript was straight away rejected.

Second Phase: After receiving a rejection letter from the editor's office of the Journal of the Pakistan Dental Association, the manuscript was written following the guidelines and was submitted in Annals of Saudi Medicine on 19 May 2003. We received a reply from the editorial office dated June 27, 2003 with the comments that, introduction can be shortened as it is quite lengthy. The paragraph in the discussion which talks about changes in different parameter in different lung diseases is also long and can be summarized. During the second round the reason for rejection of the manuscript was that, the author tried to convince the Editor and reviewers, but keeping in view their queries author did not respond. Moreover,

the journal was not specific to occupational and environmental medicine therefore, the manuscript was rejected.

Third Phase: Then this manuscript was re-organized following the journal's guidelines and submitted on May 17, 2004 in the Saudi Medical Journal. We received a reply from the editorial office dated July 23, 2004, informing that the study is not original, because one can find numerous reports on this issue in the published literature. However, selection of the study material composed entirely of non-smokers is its good point. Owing to this selection, the authors did not have to analyze the tobacco effect. Moreover, the reviewers have doubts about inclusion criteria accepted for the study, if the aim of the study was to evaluate the influence of occupational exposure on lung function, why all subjects with respiratory problems such as chronic bronchitis, emphysema and bronchial asthma, had been excluded. Certainly the analysis on spirometric parameters in subjects not reporting any symptoms is interesting, but those excluded because for respiratory problems should also be described. In our point of view the main reason for rejection of the manuscript was not the lack of novelty of the research work and our inclusion and exclusion criteria, but we failed to educate the appropriate readers and to select the precise journal with occupational and environmental health.

Fourth Phase: After this third rejection, the authors critically analyzed the problems with the manuscript such as title of the manuscript, selection of the journal in association with occupational medicine and environmental health, knowing the targeted audience and the importance of our study. Additionally, the manuscript was written strictly following the guidelines and submitted in International Journal of Occupational Medicine and Environmental Health in May 06, 2005.

We received a reply from the editorial office dated June 17, 2005 with comments that the reviewer would like to emphasize that the manuscript presents a valuable material, well constructed and will be published in Decem-

ber 2005. All these facts strengthen the manuscript for getting into a print.

DISCUSSION

It is well known that scientists publish their findings because, publications make an essence of academic life and disseminate knowledge. These pursuits encourage discussion within the professional community besides fundamental component of an academic career and develop the scholarly based development of the health policies.²⁻⁵ Additionally, publications become a source of communication between friends, within and across the field, and to gain recognition.⁴ Furthermore, medical writing has career-enhancing advantages along with significant amount of personal satisfaction.

Applying for the research grants, its approval, hiring a research team, collection of equipment is a long research journey. After approval of research grants scientists conduct challenging experiments, make efforts in data collection, and analyze the data nicely and burn the mid night oil in manuscript writing. The point which deserve to be discussed is that, scientists put their efforts on various aspects of the scientific writing but what the scientists don't usually do is try to understand the right path to successful publication and selection of the right journal.

While writing manuscript essential decisions which should be taken include depth and breadth of available data, title of the manuscript, selection of journal and it's ranking and strictly follow the Journal's guidelines for the submission of manuscript. Thus the first, and perhaps most important, consideration in writing a scientific paper is ensuring that it is focused and there is a clear message for intended readers.⁴ The writing environment should be supportive, motivating, challenging and non-threatening. The writing experience must have a clear purpose with tightly focused objectives and outcome. Furthermore, before starting to write analyze the problem and inquire; what information do I wish to present, what specific group of readers I am writing for, what background information readers have, and

what is the logical sequence in which I should present the information to the readers. Selection of the journal should be made before putting a pen on a paper⁶ and based on the manuscript title, novelty of the research work, types of the readers and the prestige [impact factor] of the journal. Title should reflect the entire core contents of the manuscript, an appropriate association between the title of the manuscript and the title of the journal will facilitate the manuscript for editorial review. Because large number of journals have a identified targeted readers such as Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, Radiation Research, Cancer, Medical Education etc. The title is the first part of the manuscript reader looks at, a good title is like an honest advertisement, the reader will be attracted to the manuscript and a poor title is like a quarantine sign the reader will approach only close enough to read the sign and then hurry away. Title should have good taste, fascinate the reader, same tone as the essay. Title should be Specific enough to describe the contents of the paper, not so technical that only specialists understand and should be appropriate for the targeted audience.⁷

While selecting the journal researcher should also consider the impact factor of the journal, in spite of its limitations, journal impact factor can be used as a rough indicator of scientific quality in specific subject categories. Impact factor is presumably a marker for the importance and significance of influence of a journal.⁸ Furthermore, it has been reported that, it may provide quantitative tools for evaluating, ranking, categorizing and comparing the journals.⁴ Many scientists believe that impact factor is the level of credibility attached to the journal and is an important factor for deciding where to publish a manuscript. It has also been reported that the best journals are those in which it is most difficult to have an article accepted and these are the journals that have a high impact factor.⁹ However, some scientists believe that impact factor is misunderstood and is not a perfect tool to decide the prestige and quality of the journal, does not measure the

quality of publication but mostly the quantity is more of a popularity gauge than quality.^{10,11} But there is nothing better; it has advantage of already being in existence, therefore, a good technique for scientific evaluation.¹² It has also been reported that impact factor is the valid indicator for assessing the quality of the journal. Therefore, scientists while selecting a journal should make a balance between the worth of their scientific work and the impact factor of the journal.¹³ Some editors believe that despite criticism Impact Factor is an indication of quality of a journal. However it should not be the only criteria to judge the quality and standard of a journal.¹⁴

The author should work in five constantly overlapping stages, thinking & planning the structure; thinking about the readers; choosing the words; forming the sentences and building the paragraphs. Researchers believe that while manuscript writing, authors should think and stop [what you have written]; review [what you have done]; think again [what is to come]. Furthermore, do not try to finish the manuscript writing in one go through, it is suggested to take a pause for the period of 3-4 weeks than again restart to write the manuscript because with the passage of a time knowledge will enhance and support the manuscript with new ideas and better scientific material along with building of strong paragraphs. Furthermore, beginning with the exciting material and ending with a lack of luster often leaves the readers disappointed and destroys the sense of momentum. Therefore, the writing taste should be continued till its conclusion.¹⁵ The objective of opening paragraph is to engage the reader's attention, to identify the central issue of the subject and to create the tone of the manuscript. However, the function of the concluding paragraph is to make last effort to convince the reader and provide a satisfying sense of closure.¹⁶

CONCLUSION

Scientific manuscript writing must have a clear purpose with tightly focused outcome and

objectives. Select the appropriate journal and strictly follow the format of the journal, consider the core message of the manuscript, novelty of the research work, type of the readers and prestige of the journal. Furthermore, it is also suggested that institutions should provide training services for improving the scientific writing skills.

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