MY LIFE AS AN EDITOR AND CONSULTANT OF MEDICAL JOURNALS

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INTRODUCTION
Over the past decade, we have witnessed an increase in the number of scientific journals in different parts of the world. This would partly be attributed to the availability of free online publishing platforms such as the Open Journal System (OJS) of Public Knowledge Project (PKP). As a regional consultant for some of these journals, I have helped them with improving their work. Over these years, I learned that establishing a journal with a good platform does not necessarily mean that it is going to be a quality journal. To have a good journal, the editorial team members, including the Editor-in-Chief, have to learn about the set international rules and adhere to them — noblesse oblige. Herein, I’m going to walk you through the path I have taken in the last three decades.

MY CAREER IN JOURNAL EDITING
My first exposure to editorship craft was in 1994, when the late Prof. Karim Vessal, the founder and Editor-in-Chief of the Iranian Journal of Medical Sciences (IJMS), a quarterly medical journal published by my alma mater, Shiraz University of Medical Sciences, encouraged me to join his editorial team in capacity of the editorial assistant. As years past, I learned a lot, some through the trial and error too, and promoted to the post of Executive Editor. I was also among the founding members of Archives of Iranian Medicine (AIM), the official publication of the Iranian Academy of Medical Sciences and served the Journal as one of its Executive Editors between 1998 and 2000.

An important turn point in this path was the opportunity to participate in the Fourth International Congress on Peer Review in Biomedical Publication held in Barcelona, Spain in 2001. I was indebted for this opportunity to the late Prof. Mansour Haghshenas, who strongly encouraged me to take part in the Congress. It changed all my career and life. There were my first encounters with brilliant stars in the galaxy of medical journalism. I learned a lot and returned home with numerous ideas to improve our journal. Probably, the most important point I learned was that I needed to change the way I looked at the journalism topics — I was mistakenly constantly asking about the ways our journal could be covered in indexing systems, while the right question was how the quality of our journal could be enhanced; I didn’t then appreciate that indexing comes with quality. In the Congress I made many friends and became acquainted with the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME), the European...
Association of Science Editors (EASE), Committee On Publication Ethics (COPE), and other important bodies in journalism.

In 2002, I was assigned as the director of a short course on scientific writing in my hometown, Shiraz ran by two Lancet Editors, David Sharp and Stuart Spencer. After having a lively discussion with them and learning about each other, I was interested in working with The Lancet Journal group; they proposed a position, and I have served the Journal as one of the Editorial Consultant for The Lancet since August 2005. In this capacity, I helped the Journal in various ways; for example, with the design of the Journal Website. Between 2011 and 2013, I was the Honorary Editor of The Lancet, Middle East Edition. Since 2012, I served The Lancet as a Contributing Editor and wrote a number of essays on various health topics for around three years (available from http://www.thelancet.com/global-health/from-our-me-editor).

In 2003, I began my close collaboration with WAME, first in the capacity of the Director, then Secretary, Vice President, and finally, the President (from January 2012 to December 2013).

RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES IN JOURNAL EDITING, QUALITY PUBLISHING, AND EVIDENCE-BASED APPROACHES TO SCIENCE EDITING

Our practice needs to be evidence-based. I believe that in science publishing, we should also consider evidence-based practice or “evidence-based journalism,” the term I coined in 2011 (available from https://doi.org/10.3325/cmj.2011.52.212). In a paper I showed that the common belief that the title of scientific article should be concise may be baseless; in fact, published articles with longer titles have received more citations than those with shorter titles. Fortunately, many scientists are conducting research studies on various aspects of journalology including peer review, replicability of published studies, scientometrics, etc. The results of these studies are presented and discussed in various scientific forums (such as WAME and Peer Review Congress) and journals (such as JAMA, BMJ, European Science Editing, and Journal of Korean Medical Sciences).

HOW JOURNALS IN CENTRAL ASIA MAY IMPROVE THEIR INDEXING AND GLOBAL VISIBILITY

Given the high penetrance of the Internet across the globe, visibility of journals is no longer a serious issue if the journal Website is constructed professionally. The Website should be designed so that different bots and crawlers can automatically retrieve the basic information and metadata for indexing the journal in international catalogues. Nevertheless, a problem that still remains is the vicious circle of inadequacy many small journals suffer from. Authors of quality manuscripts do not submit their work to small journals, which are not covered by prestigious indexing systems such as Medline, Scopus, Embase, and Current Contents. Prestigious indexing systems, on the other hand, do not include small journals for lack of publishing important and influential articles. Increasing the visibility of the journal and improving the quality of published articles are two important keys to attain recognition by indexing systems.

MY MESSAGE TO CENTRAL ASIAN JOURNAL EDITORS

To gain an international acceptance, journals being published in Central Asia need to have a higher visibility and being covered by major indexing systems. Competing with prestigious journals on publishing mainstream research (e.g., molecular biology) is fighting an uphill battle. The Central Asian journal should instead, insist on publishing research studies investigating local and regional disease conditions, not well-known to physicians practicing in western countries, diseases such as echinococcosis and leishmaniasis, which are prevalent in Central Asian countries but rare in western nations. By stressing on geographic medicine, journals publishing in the region can have something new to say, fill in parts of the knowledge gap, and ultimately find their way to internationally recognized indexing system and stance in the world literature.

IS THERE A NEED TO UNITE EFFORTS OF JOURNAL EDITORS AND LAUNCH A NEW ASSOCIATION SERVING INTERESTS OF RESEARCHERS AND JOURNAL EDITORS IN CENTRAL ASIA?

The problems editors of small journals face are very different from those editors practicing in western mainstream journals are dealing with. For example, while editors of most of the journals being published in western nations leave all publishing processes (e.g., copy editing, page layout, and development of necessary XML files) to professional publishers, most editors of small journals (including many periodicals being published in Central Asia) have to do all these stuff in their office with unprofessional staff. Given the different nature of the problems, it is of paramount importance that editors of the region have a forum to discuss their problems and share their ideas on how to
successfully run a journal with available resources. The editors can be members of WAME to learn about international standards. In the meantime, they can establish their own regional and local associations focusing more on their regional and local needs. Two successful examples I was involved in their establishment are Eastern Mediterranean Association of Medical Editors (EMAME) and Indonesian Association of Medical Editors (IndAMed).

Figure 1. Photo taken in 2011 at the Editorial Office of The International Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (The IJOEM), Shiraz, southern Iran. From left to right are Dr. Farrokh Habibzadeh, the late Prof. Karim Vessal, and Dr. Armen Gasparyan
МОЯ ЖИЗНЬ В КАЧЕСТВЕ РЕДАКТОРА И КОНСУЛЬТАНТА МЕДИЦИНСКИХ ЖУРНАЛОВ
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