FELLOWSHIP AT JAGIELLONIAN UNIVERSITY MEDICAL COLLEGE

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Advancing research and writing skills through international collaboration is vital for gaining academic competences and competitiveness of health professionals worldwide. Regular international visits and research fellowships are essential in this regard. PhD students may gain a lot by engaging in effective collaborations and visiting centres of research excellence.

As PhD students, in 2023, we were fortunate to spend a three-month fellowship at the Jagiellonian University Medical College, Krakow, Poland, successfully supervised by our scientific consultant Dr Olena Zimba. The idea of arranging such a fellowship was generated by one of the eminent Polish scientist, Prof. Mariusz Korkosz, who offered an opportunity to join faculty of one the world top universities and discuss with the University administration prospects of exchange projects with joint research and publishing initiatives.

This unique fellowship included special meetings with representatives of the administration, research ethics committees, libraries, and publishing house of Jagiellonian University. It also included clinical observership by Ainur Issakulova who attended outpatient clinics, deepened her knowledge of managing patients with rheumatic and other internal diseases, and expanded her views of ethical clinical research. Ainur Issakulova was welcomed by highly skilled Polish clinicians who introduced facilities of University Hospital in Krakow, one of the centres of clinical excellence in Europe.

Our meeting with the University Ethics Committee Chair coincided with publishing a review article and running a related online survey of roles and functions of research ethics committees. During the meeting, we shared our views on the role of ethics committees in ensuring effective and safe clinical research, monitored by such committees at all stages of the research process. We familiarized with essentials of research protocol submission and evaluation procedures. We were also informed about the University strategic plans to develop two separate branches of the committees, focusing on bioethics and clinical research. Such plans came to fruition during the hectic peri-pandemic period. The concept of diversifying the structures was aimed at speeding up the ethics procedures by experts in
experimental and clinical research. The structure, organization, and strategic plans of the ethics committees in Krakow were different from those of our local committees. Research institutions in Kazakhstan have (bio)ethics committees that evaluate research protocols of all types of studies, without distinction between experimental and clinical research.

To better serve the interests of scholarly contributors and readers, researchers and journal editors should organize their work by regular searches through online bibliographic databases. Updated and upgraded editorial recommendations, publication ethics statements, and expert guidance on internationalization and digitization may contribute to the improved indexing and visibility of publications. Throughout our three-month fellowship, we enjoyed a privileged unrestricted access to the Jagiellonian University Library and most of its online resources which was quite helpful for planning and drafting our articles. The Library staff invited us for yet another special face-to-face meeting and arranged a comprehensive guided tour, introducing myriads of research and education opportunities at one of the world’s oldest academic libraries. The overcrowded library facilities surprised us with their quiet working atmosphere and contagious brainstorming thoughts flying in the air. In fact, the atmosphere in the Library was instrumental for working with literature, generating hypotheses, and transforming ideas into research and reviews. Technical innovations in the Library were also amazing, with contactless check-in and check-outs and easy and quick access to physical copies of books, periodicals, and online databases (e.g., Scopus, Web of Science, UpToDate).

The University librarians shared their views on evolving concepts and diversifying scholarly functions of social media which intrigued us all and helped Maidan Mukhamediyarov to better organize his PhD dissertation work in a related field.

Indexing journals has numerous advantages for research and development in the digitization age. Researchers and authors conduct bibliographic searches for comprehensive and systematic analyses of articles relevant to their research studies. Research and academic institutions are also interested in the bibliographic records of their faculties and seek to expand the indexing of their periodicals to improve their rankings and successfully compete in the global academic arena. Improved understanding of journal indexing and its impact can motivate authors and journal editors alike to draft, edit, and publish quality works. One of our special meetings was organized by the University journal and magazine editors who shared their editing experience and proudly presented collections of their magazine Alma Mater. We learned a
lot about the importance of running university journals, magazines, and newspapers which cover not just scientific accounts but also news and views on culture, history, language, and hospitality. The University, Poland, and Krakow itself are proud of their fellows, and particularly Nicolaus Copernicus, an astronomer, mathematician, mechanic, and the author of the heliocentric system of the world. Nicolaus Copernicus was the initiator of the first scientific revolution. His numerous portraits and sculptures are all around in the University and elsewhere in Krakow.

In our free time we enjoyed the hospitality of our Polish supervisors and ordinary people in Krakow who treated us with warmth and often recalled how Kazakhs helped their ancestors to survive the deportation to Kazakhstan in the mid 30s of the past century.

The three-month fellowship proved invaluable for sharing views, learning more, strengthening our ties with our Polish supervisors, friends, and colleagues from one of the world’s top universities. The fellowship has helped us to work more on our PhD dissertations and understand how ethical research can change the world and contribute to its sustainable development.

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