MY LIFE AS A RESEARCHER AND EDITOR

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Introduction

I am an Associate Professor of Clinical Immunology and Rheumatology at the School of Medicine at Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology (KIIT) Deemed University. I had completed my MBBS and MD (Internal Medicine) from Assam Medical College, Dibrugarh, Assam, that had started off as one of the oldest medical schools in Asia (erstwhile John Berry White Medical School).

I have served as a reviewer for around 25 medical journals and am currently on the Editorial Boards of six. I also had the opportunity to serve as the sub-dean of the Indian College of Rheumatology before it was dissolved in 2019. I have had the honour of obtaining the Asia Pacific League of Associations for Rheumatology (APLAR) Research Grant in 2019 and the APLAR EULAR Exchange Fellowship in 2020. Currently, I am the team lead for the APLAR workforce for formulating guidelines for Telemedicine in Rheumatology.

The love of my life has always been research and teaching. The love for the sciences and nature had helped me win in a few Mathematics and Chemistry Olympiads in my pre-medical days. Also, it has got me a 'B' certificate in the National Cadet Corps (NCC) during my medical days as a medical undergraduate. My hobbies include photography and debating.

My research career (mentors, path, and main achievements)

My first venture in the world of research was when I got a chance to present a project on the Applications of Radioisotopes at Bhabha Atomic Research Centre

(BARC), Mumbai during my second year of MBBS. The thrill of landing in Mumbai to see the twin research reactors, Cirus and Dhruva, was matched only by the climb to the top of Apsara, the oldest nuclear reactor in Asia. My first lesson in research was learning the need to have good contacts.

My first formal research project was under the stewardship of India's premier medical research institute, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR). It was an approximate \$100 for a studentship project titled "Diagnosis of Breast Lumps with Minimal Resources" in my final year of MBBS. I presented this work at the second Asian and the third national medical students research conference, MEDICON 2009. These were just baby steps, and I made many errors in my methodology and writing. But these helped me learn. Also, I was inspired by my anatomy professor, Prof Giriraj Kusre, who had set up genetic facility at AMC battling against all professional and personal odds.

For my MD (Internal Medicine), we had to submit a dissertation and my work on Parvovirus-B19 and Chikungunya arthritis won the best thesis award in my medical school. However, the methodology was not strong enough and thus, I could not publish it. These made me learn about research methodology and scientific writing.

Then I got into the Doctoral programme in Clinical Immunology and Rheumatology at Sanjay Gandhi Postgraduate Institute (SGPGI), Lucknow. There I understood the role of mentors. Each of the professors, Prof Ramnath Misra, Prof Amita Aggarwal, Prof Vikas Agarwal and Prof Able Lawrence, had a unique

perspective on medicine, science and life in general. Each had a ton of publications, but were practical and humble.

The highest point during my time at SGPGI was getting an oral presentation at the American College of Rheumatology (ACR) Annual meet 2017. The ACR meet is where around 15000 rheumatologists from around the globe get together.

The openness of the faculty at SGPGI and the availability of various research tools was a shot in the arm for my zeal for research. Two years back, I joined the KIIT University. It is modelled on European Universities with a medical school next to other campuses including the Sciences, and the Arts. Most medical schools in India are isolated from basic sciences. Thus, I have an advantage of unique cross-platform research. Here, I have come across the KIIT-Technology Business Incubator that deals with translating research into market ready products. Thus, my interest is currently shifting from pure research to translatable research.

In the last couple of years, I have managed to publish a couple of articles in *The New England Journal of Medicine* and *The Lancet*. The thrill of those publications leaves a yearning for more.

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted some plans. With the hospital staff stretched thin with COVID-19 duties, I am having to run the outpatients' departments six days a week from 9 am to 5 pm. After that, attending to my reviewer and editor duties, leaves me very little time to catch up with my own research work. Still, with the encouragement of some great mentors, I have churned out more than twenty manuscripts since the onset of COVID-19.

Teaching, as mentioned before, has always been dear to me. Even in my medicine fellowship days, I used to take 2-8 classes per week of different batches of undergraduates. In the last one year, the shift to online education has been a challenge. What I miss the most is reactions of the students. However, it has enabled me to reach wider audiences. I can teach to my juniors at alma mater, Assam Medical College, that lacks a rheumatology department. I have also participated in teaching basic immunology to physicians of Bangladesh. I truly believe this is going to be the future for equitable distribution of medical knowledge and inclusion of marginalized communities and minorities.

My editorial career

I was introduced to the world of reviewing and editing through my senior colleague Dr Durga Prasanna Misra. Through him, I also met Prof Armen Yuri Gasparyan, a senior editor and very able mentor. Both Dr Durga and Prof Armen provided me invaluable feedback on my peer reviewing. Now, I have reviewed almost a thousand journal articles for more than a score of journals. This reviewer activity has given me invaluable knowledge about scientific writing, publication ethics, and kept me updated in the world of research. Thanks to this knowledge, I have been invited to join Editorial Boards of six journals.

The first was the *Indian Journal of Rheumatology* (IJR) for which I also act as a Social Media Editor. The IJR conducts periodic seminars on scientific writing and publication ethics. As a faculty member of such seminars, I have myself also understood the intricacies of journal indexing, author, journal and article metrics, and various other aspects. It has shown me how along with doing good research, we must be able to present it in the correct perspective also.

The reviewing and editorship has opened new doors for me, and now have the opportunity to shift towards these completely. However, I am primarily a researcher and the greatest of all laboratories is the hospital. I hold it to be the greatest achievement to notice something in the ward, to bring it to the bench and experiment and to find something that can bring change to the patients, and to take it back to the bedside.

How research and editing transform our scholarly activities

Some research is done for the sake of author metrics, some is repetition just for the sake of it. But true research shapes the future of mankind. Before Einstein proposed the Special Theory of Relativity, the pundits had thought that there was nothing new to be discovered in physics! Nevertheless, there are tonnes of published material coming out each year. There needs to be curators. The men of sciences need to be the gatekeepers also. Gregor Mendel's work had three citations in 35 years before people rediscovered the importance of his work.

Thus we have the role of peer reviewers, language editing and ethical dissemination of published work. The ideal peer reviewer is not only a master in the field, but also has an uncanny mastery of the written word as well as a voracious student of biostatistics. But above all, the ideal reviewer is an astute scientist who understands the clinical significance above and beyond the statistical

significance. Ideal reviewers do not appear overnight and must be groomed and inculcated.

Peer review teaches critical appraisal and thus, must be a part of medical education. Similar, along with research methodology, students must also learn how to write up their research and get it published in the correct place. Research teaches. Thus, every researcher should be a teacher: so that the student can start where the teacher left off. To quote Newton "If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of Giants."

Teaching, research, peer reviewing must therefore go hand in hand. There has to be unity across artificially created narrow walls.

How India may benefit from quality research, fair peer review, and quality editing

India has enormous potential, especially human resources. I may be biased about my own country, but one needs to look at how the country responded during the COVID-19 crisis. RT-PCR testing was scaled up thousand fold. The cost per test spiralled from \$60 at the beginning of the pandemic to \$5 after one year. Personal protection equipment production was stepped up to enable exports. India has demonstrated one of the highest vaccine production capacity in the world.

Just some streamlining, selection of quality over quantity, and understanding science in its true sense can bring about dramatic changes, at par with the best in the business. The various disconnects between patient care, basic research, translation, and practical patient friendly products need to be addressed by proper education. One word is integration. India has been known for its unity in diversity. We need to bring this on the medical

education front. We need to bring together the various stakeholders. We need the correct mentors across international borders. Maybe 20 years invested in such initiatives can take India to the top of medical education and innovation.

My message to ongoing researchers and educators in Central Asia

Recently, I have reviewed researcher activity in Central Asia. I think Central Asia is not unlike India. There is no dearth of potential but some guidance can really bring a shine to the diamonds in the dust.

Practically, it would make sense to build a virtual network amongst yourselves and across to colleagues in Europe and even India. Be it a mentor-mentee relationship or an equal collaboration, there will be growth on both sides. Along with research, adequate focus should be on learning how prepare manuscripts and how to get it accepted. Attending international conferences can be both eye-openers as well as opportunities to make new contacts and friends. Like-minded people across countries, and across specialities can make a difference. My message would be to "start small but go on". Things get tough. Research seems difficult at times. Why put in that extra effort when you can just see a couple of patients daily and live a satisfied life? The answer is in the human nature to strive for more, do more, learn more. We have make two patients happy with our daily work, but what if we make a discovery that changes the lives of a thousand patients?

*"Made weak by Time and Fate; but strong in Will,
To Strive, to Seek, to Find, and not to Yield."*
- Ulysses, by Alfred Lord Tennyson

In 2007 at Bhabha Atomic Research Centre, Mumbai during second year of MBBS. Along with officials and 32 selected participants from different subjects and different parts of the country. Was awarded the first prize for the project on “Application of Radiosiotopes”

At the Second Asian and Third Indian Undergraduate Medical Students Conference, MEDICON held at Mangalore in 2009. Interacting with Prof Vinay Kumar, Author of popular pathology textbooks including Robbins Basis of Pathology

ЗЕРТТЕУШІ ЖӘНЕ РЕДАКТОР РЕТІНДЕГІ МЕНІҢ ӨМІРІМ

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