

## Medical Writing in Pakistan ..... Where do we stand!

Medical writing and research have played a pivotal role in the progress and advancements in medical science. Be it the accidental discovery of penicillin while growing bacteria in Petri dishes by Alexander Fleming, or the cloning of Dolly, it is the Human Being's desire to explore and uncover hidden realms. It is medical research that has enabled Man to conquer many of the diseases that were previously considered undefeatable. Literature review reveals articles dating back to the medieval times. Medical and scientific writing in English has evolved over more than a millennium, from its genesis in the Anglo-Saxon era to its present-day position as the 'lingua franca' of science. Medical writing, per se, is divided into various different types, mainly: case reports, editorials, original articles, review articles, pictorial essays, technical notes and commentaries. Each type of paper is specific in nature, serves a distinct purpose and is judged by different criteria.<sup>1</sup>

The world over, students are introduced to the concept of research and medical writing, and are encouraged to actively participate in it from the time they enter medical college. Medical writing is considered, not only a medium of expression, but an integral part of their medical education. Before they graduate, almost all have multiple articles and reports to their name. Many of these students go on to become lifelong researchers and devote themselves in quest for knowledge. However, the vast majority is of those who carry on their medical practices, while churning out articles simultaneously.

In Pakistan, the situation is not as bright. The sad state of affair in most of the medical colleges and universities of Pakistan is inadequate teaching of graduates about medical research concept<sup>2</sup> For most of our young aspiring doctors, research and writing articles is a concept they come across in the fourth year of their medical training, and to them, is just an exam paper they need to clear to get their final medical degree. Even after graduation, only a handful of doctors actively participate in writing articles and reporting cases as case reports. Even fewer are those who have articles published in indexed journals. Over the years, organizations have been made to improve this situation, but they are still in their infantile stages as far as result is concerned.

The Pakistan Medical Research Council (PMRC) was created under a resolution in 1962 on the recommendation of the Medical Reforms Commission as an autonomous organization under the Federal Ministry of Health, with the mandate to promote, organize and coordinate medical research in Pakistan. To achieve its functions the main strategy adopted by the Council was the development of collaboration with health academic institutions by establishing Research Centers in both the undergraduate and postgraduate medical institutions of the country.

Pakistan Medical Journalists Associations was formed in 1977, with the objective to propagate medical writing among our doctors. The Association has organized seminars and workshops on "Medical Writing" in different institutions all over the country. It has also organized seminars on "Medical Writing" in collaboration with Pakistan Cardiac Society, Pakistan Society of Physicians, Pakistan Society of Otolaryngologist and Pakistan Association of Dermatologists during their annual/biennial conferences.

On its part, College of Physicians and Surgeons has made it necessary for every postgraduate trying for a specialization, to conduct a research/write dissertation in their respective fields of interest, or publish 2 papers in reputed journals. It also conducts mandatory workshops on medical writing. However, because of the lack of training in undergraduate years, a lot of candidates face difficulties, be it in the selection of topic or having their final dissertation selected. In most of the cases, the synopsis and then dissertation are rejected multiple times. Similarly four mandatory workshops for the supervisor in the field of medical education is also a step in their regard.

Most of the colleges have now started to encourage their students towards medical writing. A number of colleges have started their own journals and encourage students to take part in the publication.

We at Sheikh Zayed Medical College, Rahim Yar Khan are also trying to orient our faculty and students towards research and medical writing. SZMC is a relatively new institution, and we have attempted to sow the seed of medical writing in our students from the very beginning. A number of projects are underway and articles of International repute have been published from this institution in its infancy. Numbers of

outstanding Research Awards are at the credit of faculty and students. We have successfully published first four issues of the Journal of Sheikh Zayed Medical College (JSZMC). On a broader note, a lot of work is still required in this field. Our teachers need to be properly trained in research protocol and medical writing, if they are to propagate it to the future doctors. Doctors themselves need to work in this area. Medical writing is an integral part of medical sciences. No advances in medical science can be made without it. In this age of extreme competition, we must strive to bring ourselves at par with the world.

Or else we will be left far behind !

## REFERENCES

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2. Haider J. Problems encountered by postgraduate trainee during dissertation writing. *Pakistan Journal of medical sciences* 2009;25(3):520-1.