

JPPS – EXPERIENCE OF PUBLISHING SCIENTIFIC JOURNAL FROM A DEVELOPING COUNTRY AND IN A CONFLICT ZONE

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This is last issue of the JPPS to be published by our editorial team, as we will be handing over editorial responsibilities to the new team. For me this is end of an era in psychiatry in Pakistan, which started a decade ago. After regular publication for a decade, we feel relieved that the duty is done but job is still unfinished and I am confident that the new team will take the journal to the highest standards. This is time to look back over the last 10 years and share my thoughts and some history relating to the journal, which our editorial team nurtured with great passion and spirit.

It was 10 years back when I received a call from Late Prof. Mussarat Hussain, asking whether I would like to take responsibility of the editor of a journal to be published by Pakistan Psychiatric Society. Being freshly appointed Assistant Professor at the time and with no experience in scientific publishing I was very reluctant. The only exposure, I had to the editorial world of scientific journals at that time, was that of some harsh editorial comments, which I received from on my articles submitted to some top journals in the field. Like any young researchers, I thought that the journal would welcome my startling new ideas. But this was not to be the case and instead I learnt some useful lessons in the editorial world! After encouraging remarks from my seniors and discussions with few colleagues I decided to take the challenge.

The first issue of the journal was a daunting task and there are many stories to tell about our rather naïve attempt to bring out a state of the art journal. Late Prof. Mussarat Husain was holding an international psychiatric conference in few months time and he wanted to publish the journal on occasion of the conference. I received few articles but despite some good science, most were very inadequate in the expression and format. Unbelievable this many sound, but I had to rewrite most of article, improving the writing, expression and formatting to the journal style. But worst was to come. Considering that the printing facilities were not of high quality at that time in Peshawar, I sent the final content of the journal on a CD to the press in Karachi. This press was printing all the conference proceeding and I was assured that I can relax now as the team in Karachi will print the journal and distribute it during the conference to all PPS members.

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To my horror, when I received final printed copy it had several mistakes. Most notably, in some articles, complete sections such as abstract were missing. This was a nightmare for me, as there were only few days left for the conference and I had already committed to bring the journal for all participants. We decided to discard all 500 copies and printed the whole journal again at Peshawar. An imprint of the journal page is given at the end of this editorial in order to save a piece of the history. To the credit of my team, we still managed to print the journal on time, for the international psychiatric conference. This was the first mistake and we learnt that a quality journal can only be published by close monitoring and supervision of every step, right from receiving article to the printing of last copy from press. It was a steep learning curve. Since then the journal has published regularly and indexed in major national and international data bases.

There can be several indicators to gauge the “impact” of a journal published from a small organization, such as Pakistan Psychiatric Society (PPS), with less than 500 members. These can be the regularity of publication, visibility at national and international levels, contributions to debate on vital mental health issues and the scientific rigor of published articles. As a journal which was published in extremely resource poor settings, JPPS had considerable impact on most of these parameters. A particular focus of JPPS has been on highlighting the mental health problems in developing countries, reflected in almost all the editorial content of the journal. Number of articles from countries like India truly represents this.

JPPS maintained regular publication in exceptionally stressful and traumatic times at editorial base in Peshawar. There were at least six deadly bomb blasts near the Psychiatry Department, Lady Reading Hospital during these years, not to mention several other blasts, road blocks, suicide bombings and targeted killings in and around the city but journal was never late in its publication.

One outstanding feature of the journal has been international high quality contributions from all the major academic centers of the world. All guest editorials, which has been a regular feature of the journal, were written by highly respected opinion leaders in their field. I was sometimes pleasantly surprised by the willingness of very busy academicians to contribute to the journal. An example in this issue is the highly valuable Guest Editorial by Peter Tyrer, who just retired after 10 years of highly successful role as editor of the British Journal of Psychiatry. He advises in his usual candid way about writing for high

impact journals and this should be a must read for the young researchers. The original articles with high quality of articles scientific content from countries like U.K, Australia and India were also regular feature.

All these success stories should be balanced against some failures, I would say my regrets. I always wanted to have more local research published. Despite improving and in some cases rewriting scientifically sound articles in expression and format at editorial office, I regret we could not publish many local articles. Another regret is that we could not have many local reviewers. We had a policy of a local reviewer and a foreign reviewer for each submitted article. Unfortunately, I have to say that there were handful of local reviewers, whose reviews left much to be desired in quality and commitment. All scientific journals especially in small under developed specialty like psychiatry face these problems. The content worth any scientific rigour is submitted in international journals or general journals in Pakistan such as JCPSP or JPMA, with frequent publications and much more resources.

Survival has been the main priority during this period. There are several hurdles in maintaining regular publication of the journal in Pakistan. Demise of number of journals after publication of few issues has been a feature of scientific publications in Pakistan. Even a journal indexed in PubMed from Pakistan, recently lost its indexation as regular publication could not be maintained. This was even more difficult as we did not have a reliable source for funding. Advertisements were the main source of finance but even these have not always been available and the last issue was published without any advertisements. We discussed publication charges several times which are being levied by many scientific journals in Pakistan but fortunately could continue publication without these. It was felt that these charges mostly discourage

the genuine researchers, while those publishing papers in order to meet the requirements of promotion in teaching cadre could easily pay these charges. Despite the fact that almost all finances were through pharmaceuticals, the readers would agree that the journal remained completely free of any industry influence. The editorial team had been conscious of this potential conflict of interest and there is not a single instance of any article during these years which could be linked with the industry.

Publishing a scientific journal regularly for 10 years in such circumstances was an uphill task, made only possible with exceptionally dedicated team. The assistant and associate editors, who all worked in psychiatry department of Lady Reading Hospital during these years, formed the backbone of our editorial team. They worked quietly but tirelessly with complete dedication without any expectation of recognition or reward. At the same time, I am confident that this was a true learning experience for all members of editorial team, giving them a unique opportunity to gain experience of scientific publishing and communicating on regular basis with leading authorities on the subject.

I would like to apologies to many who were disappointed at one stage or another, as I could not accept their contributions. They did contribute to the journal, firstly by submitting their work and then accepting the decision of the editor. We had a limited pool of reviewers and some were regularly reviewing number of articles at the same time. We could only acknowledge their contribution by publishing their names at the end of each year. They can take comfort from the fact that their contribution enabled the journal to flourish. I am confident that all reviewers, writers and members of the PPS will continue to contribute to the journal which we nurtured with passion and spirit, and soon the JPPS will be amongst the top in the league.

Title of the first published issue, which had to be discarded due to unacceptable mistakes

