

The race for publications

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It was an ordinary ward day, when I received a message from my senior resident who wanted to see me. I asked her to come over, thinking she may have some professional questions for discussion.

What followed in our candid conversation was an eye opener for me. She had written an article out of her fellowship dissertation and now wanted to publish it. She was asking for advice on selection of a journal. During our conversation it surfaced that the script was written by some one sitting in the research department of a hospital, and included names of friends who were working colleagues. The script writer has demanded a huge sum of money in six figures, which was supposed to be raised jointly by all the authors. The target was one of the peer reviewed journal of the country.

I appreciated her honesty, for telling the truth. Then I asked her whether she wrote the dissertation herself or someone else had written it on her behalf. To this she replied she had written the whole document herself, including the results. I was astonished and asked then why was there a need to adopt a wrong way of getting it done on payment. She replied that she was not familiar with the publication guidelines besides being short of time. I sat down with her, went through Instructions to Authors from one of the peer reviewed journals, told her how to extract a research article from her dissertation. This would not be difficult because she had written the dissertation herself.

The race for academic promotion, has produced devastating results. Recently I had the opportunity to be a member of the selection board of a University. One of the candidates interviewed, had ten papers published in one journal, within a period of 12 months. Since the journal was accepted by the governing bodies, no objection could be raised. One of the candidates had their paper published in a basic sciences journal, though her research was of Clinical sciences. To my surprise I was told any published paper in any journal will be counted, no matter if it does not belong to your discipline.

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DOI: 10.47391/JPMA.23-24

This state of affairs at the University level or in the country demands immediate attention. What kind of research are we producing and publishing? The faculty members do not have the ability to write a research article, which is a requirement for their promotion. Therefore unethical means are used to fulfill the need.

The reason behind this fact is that as a nation we have forgotten the word accountability. The publishing authority can play an important role. There are still some journals in our country which stringently check the date of ethical approval and the study period, and send it back to authors if they find a discrepancy. Why this pattern cannot be followed by all journals which have been accepted for inclusion in the publication list of the authorities? Also the journals need to reject the policy of a blanket approval provided unanimously by some Institutional Review Boards. There are many journal publishers in the country having their own individual policies. Why don't they make a single joint policy according to the guidelines of universally accepted authorities. The criteria for publishing an article should be agreed upon by all institutions and strictly followed.

As a responsible and honest academic individual, we must also refrain from adopting such unethical practices of publishing ten articles on a monthly basis in a single journal. This can also cast a doubt on the credibility and authenticity of this journal, itself.

The Higher Education Commission should revise their criteria of accepting publications in sub-standard journals. The present system is flawed and needs immediate revision. The journals which are indexed in the National Library of Medicine (NLM), USA, are not included in the list of journals of HEC, whereas journals, charging exorbitant fees for publication of low standard articles are recognized and their name stands out in the list of accepted journals. How is this justified? The Universities also need to take a stand for maintaining the quality of published papers in their journal.

This race for publications has been aggravated as it is a mandatory requirement for promotion. There can be few authentic research papers, with the bench work done by the author, instead of producing unethical ghost publications. There should be a governing body for

scrutinizing the publishers and giving out a license to publish. Also if the authentic journals despite their load of work, can reduce the submission to publishing time and reject articles written by ghost authors, this unethical behaviour may be curbed. HEC can also consider accepting articles available on-line prior to print, it would ease out the problem.

During training for fellowship, the senior faculty members should consider it their responsibility to teach the postgraduates on how to get published in a recognized

journal. Though College of Physicians & Surgeons accepts 2 articles for publication as an alternative to a dissertation, this pathway is less adopted by the candidates, as the short publication time keeps the postgraduates at an edge, for appearing in their exit exams.

The whole academia needs to think hard for ways to abolish ghost publications as well as selecting sub-standard, fake and predatory journals for getting their research in print.

