

The Journey of Scientific Publication

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Medical science is expanding its horizons day by day and there is an emergent need for new evidences to be documented for the dissemination of knowledge. New evidence generated from research or clinical observations need to be documented for the knowledge of a wider population. Published literature in peer reviewed journals leads to wider dissemination of data and also credits those that share their data. In these days of open access journals, there is widespread availability of information which can be reused for further experimentations. Though publications also benefit individuals, providing higher positions in the medical and academic hierarchy or subsequent funding through research programs, the basic and most **important aspect of scientific documentation is that, information is preserved for posterity to compare and build upon by future researchers.**

History of the scientific research article goes back to the seventeenth century when the Royal Society of London, became the first public institution dedicated to experimental scientific research and learning. Its initial full name was “The Royal Society of London for Improving Natural Knowledge” In 1665, the Society began publishing its Philosophical Transactions, the first and foremost scientific periodical in Europe until the 19th century. The Philosophical Transactions initially published news, letters and descriptions of experimental reports without a standardized format or style.

Observations about natural calamities like earthquakes or unusual fetuses were mostly documented in the first 80 volumes of the Transactions. Experimental reports were very scarce accounting for 5 to 20% of the features.

With the passage of time, there was a gradual evolution of the Philosophical Transactions in the 19th century when the journal was divided into two distinct sections in 1887, one dealing with mathematical and physical topics and the other with biological papers.

In those days of yore, the experiments were presented in great detail so that they could be reproducible to verify the accuracy of the reported results. As the genre evolved, these detailed descriptions were replaced by today’s usually concise Materials and Methods section of research articles. However, rhetorical language

was used to express personal opinions due to a lack of confidence regarding the accuracy of the results.

Scientific reports were characterized by narrative structure and personal author centric description in the text.

Throughout the 20th century, there was a constant effort to develop the structure and content of research papers. The standardization of experimental procedures, led to a less-detailed, shorter Methodology section and greater emphasis on discussing results in order to put them in perspective and delineate their relevance. This led to the trend of comparing ones own results with other publications and citations, thus increasing the extent of the Discussion sections.

The Introduction, Methods, Results and Discussion (IMRAD) structure of research articles was constituted in 1978, following the meeting of several biomedical journal editors who formed the Vancouver Group, which later came to be designated as the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE).

ICMJE has laid down standardized formats for not only research articles but for different aspects of publication like citation methods and publication ethics.

The Journal of the Indian Medical Association (JIMA) has kept up the tradition of publication in accordance to the principles laid down by the ICMJE.

This article about the history of publications will be incomplete if we do not reminisce about the history of the Journal of the IMA, JIMA.

The Indian Medical Association launched its own journal in the name of "Indian Medical World" in March 1930, under the Editorship of Sir Nil Ratan Sircar and an All-India Editorial Board of 21 members. Altogether 18 monthly issues of the "Indian Medical World" were published. Thereafter in the 7th All India Conference of IMA, which was held in Pune, under the Presidentship of Dr Jivraj N Mehta, a new resolution was taken up to change the name of the journal to "Journal of the Indian Medical Association". Since then more than ninety two years have passed and JIMA has traversed a chequered path to cross new frontiers. It is the largest circulated indexed journal to reach out to more than 3,50,000 members of the Indian Medical Association from different specialties all over the country.

Every modern day journal has to be a part of the digital revolution that has changed the face of publication in the last two decades.

There is the shift in the paradigm with the advent of the open access online journal. Every indexed journal has a website, an online submission system, digital peer review facility and digital archives of its past publications. The JIMA is surging ahead with all these features incorporated into its system of functioning. A process of digitization of the archives of this historical journal has been undertaken to preserve the precious publications of the past which may be accessed at the click of a button.

It is a challenge to keep up with the fast expanding volume of digital information and the influx of newer evidences in disease spectra and management strategies need to be incorporated into the conglomeration of research articles, insightful systematic reviews, scientific correspondence and interesting and uncommon case descriptions in the journals in order to expand its frontiers.

Having said this, it is to be remembered that the measure of success of any journal does not stem just from the number of submissions, publications, citations, or impact factor; but through its contribution to the upgradation of next generation of physicians and overall upliftment of standard of patient care and we aspire to achieve that goal.

Long live IMA, Long live JIMA!

FURTHER READINGS

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