

PUBLISHING NON-RESEARCH ARTICLES – THE JOURNEY OF A THOUSAND MILES BEGINS WITH A SINGLE STEP

Syed Shahid Nafees Zaidi, Nausheen Bakht*, Syeda Aliza Shahid**, Saira Maroof***, Faria Ahmed**, Syed Muzaffar Hassan Kirmani

Armed Forces Institute of Cardiology/National Institute of Heart Disease/National University of Medical Sciences (NUMS) Rawalpindi Pakistan, *Combined Military Hospital Kohat/National University of Medical Sciences (NUMS) Pakistan, **CMH Lahore Medical College, Lahore/National University of Medical Sciences (NUMS) Pakistan, ***Army Medical College/National University of Medical Sciences (NUMS) Rawalpindi Pakistan

ABSTRACT

Articles published in medical and dental journals may be broadly classified as either research-based articles i.e., original publications or non-research articles i.e., other than original publications. Original research involves conception, data collection, analysis, article writing and publication. It is an uphill task especially for novice researchers. In contrast to original articles, non-research articles are both time and labor efficient and have many formats/sub-types. Although journals provide information about article formats accepted by them to prospective authors in their 'instructions to authors' section available in print and online, unfortunately, many young researchers have little awareness about this. By writing this article, we intend to facilitate the research journey of our early career researchers'. The objective of this study was to increase their awareness about the different categories of publications in which they may disseminate their scholarly work.

Keywords: Non-research publications, Non-research articles, Research, Pakistani medical journals, Pakistani dental journals.

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INTRODUCTION

Publications are considered the proverbial 'golden eggs' in one's academic career. The first academic journal was published more than 350 years ago and since then the number of journals and articles published each year have steadily grown. It has been estimated that by mid-2012, there were more than 28,000 active, scholarly, peer reviewed journals which were collectively publishing around 2 Million articles a year.^{1,2} In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the surge in scientific articles has been unequivocal.³

As per the Sultan's pyramid, researchers publish their research findings for a plethora of reasons. These include fulfilling study requirements, winning grants, securing hiring, obtaining salary increments, getting promotions to top rank positions, accomplishing long term sustainability of academic career, advancing changes in policy and practice, and achieving name and fame among the science community.^{4,5}

Globally, this mind-set exerts immense pressure on researchers who are expected to start publishing early in their careers. The scientific landscape in Pakistan is no different.

Our post graduate trainees complete their mandatory fellowship requirement set by the College of Physicians & Surgeons Pakistan by either writing 2 x

research articles or 1 x dissertation. Due to a plethora of reasons, research at post graduate level is approached in quite a helter-skelter manner. It is therefore not surprising that a vast majority of the nascent fellows find it hard to undertake the requirements of original research again any time soon. However, the pressure to publish to publish by the competitive academic environment remains unabated. This undesirable situation often translates into their getting duped by predatory journals and ghost authors.

To prevent them falling prey to lowly journals and unethical practices, it is necessary to inform them that scientific publications follow a hierarchical pattern depending upon their level of difficulty in creation and publication⁶ and they may look into exploring different categories till the time they are able to undertake original research.⁷ Publications may be broadly classified as:

- Research-based articles (Original publications)
- Non-research articles (Other than original publications)

Research-based articles (Original publications) are studies penned down by researchers who have actually performed the study. In it they describe their hypothesis or research question and the purpose of undertaking that study. They also provide detailed accounts of their research methods and findings duly discussing the possible implications of their study results for education, service and research.

Correspondence: Dr Syed Shahid Nafees Zaidi, Paeds Cardiac Surgeon, AFIC/NIHD, Rawalpindi Pakistan

Non-research articles (Other than original publications) are usually shorter, less time consuming and not very data intense. A sizeable variety of outlets is available to junior doctors namely case reports, case series, reviews, commentaries, editorials, letters etc.⁸⁻¹⁰

This article aims to apprise early career researchers about the scope of Pakistani health related journals so that they can get their scholarly work published as non-research articles (other than original publications), in line with the dictates of their message. Since even minor publications constitute an all-important line on CVs, early career researchers may look into exploring this route for securing their first few publications. This understanding, at the nascent stage of their careers, is envisaged to facilitate early career researchers in embarking upon their publication journey by taking small yet confident strides in the right direction.

METHODOLOGY

The time span of this cross-sectional study was from May to November 2021. Universal sampling was adopted and we noted down the names of all health sciences journals from Higher Education Commission (HEC) official website.

Inclusion Criteria: The inclusion criteria constituted approval status from HEC.

Exclusion Criteria: All suspended, derecognized & permanently banned journals were excluded from the study.

We then searched the website of individual journals and noted down the article types accepted by them for publication. These were arranged alphabetically and divided into two categories, namely research-based articles (original publications) and non-research articles (other than original publications).

Keeping in view the aim of the study we did not include original research articles in the study and focused on the latter category.

Since various journal used different terms, we combined the following article types into one single term for an ease of understanding:

- **Editorials:** For those penned down either by the editorial team or invited guests.
- **Letters:** For 'correspondence' and 'letters to the editor'.

RESULTS

As per HEC website, the list of recognized health science journals was last updated on September 19, 2019.

According to this list, out of 58, the number of approved journals falling in W, Y & Z categories was 4, 15 & 16 respectively which makes a total of 35. The details of the types of articles published in these HEC approved Pakistani Health Sciences journals are shown in Table-II, II & III.

Table-I: Journals in 'W' Category (n=4).

| Journal Names | Manuscript Type |
|--------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Journal of College of Physicians and Surgeons Pakistan | Audit Reports, Adverse Drug Reports, Case Reports, Clinical Practice Articles, Commentaries, Current Practices, Debates, Editorials, Evidence Based Reports, Letters, Review Articles, Short Communications, Short Articles |
| Journal Pakistan Medical Association | Audit Reports, Case Reports, Case Series, Clinical Conference Abstracts, Comments on Published Articles, Evidence Based Articles, Innovation, Letters, Meta-Analysis, Narrative Reviews, Practice Guidelines, Review Articles, Short Reports, Short Communications, Special Communications, Systematic Reviews |
| Pakistan Journal of Pharmaceutical Sciences | Mini Reviews, Review Articles |
| Pakistan Journal of Medical Sciences | Case Reports, Drug Trials, Editorials, Letters, Review Articles, Short Communications |

At the time of access, the recognition status of 23 x journals was shown as follows:

- Suspended - 3 x journals.
- Derecognized - 13 x journals.
- Permanently banned - 7 x journals.

No data regarding the article types published was found on the website of Annals of Punjab Medical College. It was hence not included.

DISCUSSION

Currently all Pakistani health related journals are categorized by HEC Journal recognition system under W, Y and Z categories, where W is the highest recognized category awarded to any journal. In addition to original articles, all these journals also publish non-research articles. Their brief description is as follows:¹¹

1. **Adverse Drug Reports/Adverse Drug Reaction Reports** deal with "noxious, unintended effects of a drug that occur in doses normally used in humans for the diagnosis, prophylaxis and treatment of disease."¹²
2. **Audit Reports** are also known as quality improvement reports. The procedure includes identifying problems, developing solutions, making changes

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Table-II: Journals in 'Y' Category (n=15).

| Journal Names | Type of Articles Published |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Pakistan Heart Journal | Audit Reports, Book Reviews, Case Reports, Case Series, Conference Reports, Editorials, Letters, Review Articles, Special Articles, Short Communications, Special Communications |
| Pakistan Pediatric Journal | Case Reports, Clinical Observations, Review Articles |
| Rawal Medical Journal | Case Reports, Commentaries, Editorials, Letters, Review Articles, Short Communications |
| Isra Medical Journal | Case Reports, Case Series, Editorials, Review Articles, Short Communications |
| Journal of Islamic International Medical College | Adverse Drug Reaction Reports, Book/CDs Reviews, Case Reports, Commentaries, Debates, Editorials, Letters, New Technology, Review Articles, Short Communications |
| Anaesthesia, Pain and Intensive Care | Case Reports, Clinipics, Cliniquiz, Editorials, Views, Review Articles, Special Articles, Trends & Technology, Unforgettable Experiences |
| Journal of the Pakistan Dental Association | Case Reports, Editorials, Letters, Review Articles, Short Communications |
| Journal of Surgery Pakistan | Audit Reports, Case Reports, Clinical Practice Articles, Editorials, Evidence Based Reports, Letters, Review Articles, Short Articles, Short Communications, Surveys |
| Journal of Liaquat University of Medical and Health Sciences | Editorials, Case Reports, Commentaries, Letters, Review Articles |
| Journal of Postgraduate Medical Institute | Case Reports, Case Series, Editorials, Letters, Review Articles, Special Articles, Short Communications |
| Pakistan Armed Forces Medical Journal | Case Reports, Editorials, Field Medicine, Letters, Rapid Communications, Review Articles |
| International Journal of Pathology | Case Reports, Editorials, History of Science, Review Articles |
| Khyber Medical University Journal | Case Series, Commentaries, Ethics, Short Communications, Special Articles, Student's Section, Studies Protocol, View Point |
| International Journal of Biology and Biotechnology | Review Articles, Short Communications |
| Annals of Punjab Medical College | Data not found on website |

to practice, and then reviewing the whole operation or service again.¹³

- Book/CD Reviews** offer a thorough description, critical analysis and/or evaluation of quality, meaning and significance of books/CDs. The aim is to

Table-III: Journals in 'Z' Category (n=16).

| Journal Names | Type of articles published |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Annals of Abbasi Shaheed Hospital & Karachi Medical & Dental College | Case Reports, Editorials, Letters, Pictorial Quiz, Special Reports, Student's Corner |
| Annals of KEMU | Adverse Drug Reports, Audit Reports, Case Reports, Clinical Practice Articles, Commentaries, Current Practices, Debates, Letters, New Techniques, Recent Advances, Review Articles, Short Articles, Short Communications |
| Journal of Ayub Medical College | Case Reports, Editorials, Pictorial, Review Articles, Short Communications |
| Journal of Medical Sciences | Case Reports, Letters, Review Articles |
| Pakistan Journal of Physiology | Book Reviews, Editorials, Letters |
| Journal of Rawalpindi Medical College | Case Reports, Editorials, Review Articles |
| The Professional Medical Journal | Audit Reports, Case Reports, Commentaries, Letters, Review Articles, Short Articles, Short Communications |
| Journal of Riphah College of Rehabilitation | Case Reports, Case Series, Letters, Review Articles, Short Communications, Special Reports |
| Journal of Islamabad Medical and Dental College | Case Reports, Letters, Review Articles |
| Pakistan Journal of Neurological Sciences | Book Reviews, Case Discussions, Frontiers of Technology, Issues in Basic Neuroscience, Issues in Clinical Practice, Letters, Neuro-Images, Perspectives, Review Articles, Short Communications |
| Pakistan Journal of Ophthalmology | Case Reports, Review Articles |
| Pakistan Journal of Medicine and Dentistry | Case Reports, Editorials, Letters, Review Articles, Short Communications, Student's Corner |
| RADS Journal of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences | Editorials, Letters, Review Articles, Short Communications, |
| Journal of the Dow University of Health Sciences | Adverse Drug Reports, Case Reports, Commentaries, Evidence Based Reports, Letters, New Techniques, Recent Advances, Review Articles, Short Communications, Special Article, Viewpoints |
| Journal of Fatima Jinnah Medical College, Lahore | Case Reports, Commentaries, Letters, Review Articles |
| Pakistan Journal of Public Health | Current Topics, Editorials, Letters, Review Articles, Short Communications, Special Reports, Opinion & Analysis |

provide insight and opinion on recently published scholarly books as well as enable young researchers to stay abreast of new literature in the field.^{14,8}

4. **Case Discussions** are interactive, student centered exploration of specific narratives.
5. **Clinical Observations** are used for measuring, evaluating or observing patients or specimens from patients for making clinical decisions.
6. **Clinical Practice Articles/Evidence Based Reports /Evidence Based Articles / Practice Guidelines** include a review of current research related to the article's subject matter. If an article includes a literature or a discussion of current research as a foundation for the resulting information presented in the article it likely qualifies as evidence-based.
7. **Clinipics / Neuro-Images / Pictorial / Cliniquiz/ Pictorial Quiz** are usually invited manuscripts which entail use of various techniques to either directly or indirectly image the structural, functional, or pharmacological aspects. They are used to assess one's education and measure one's growth in knowledge, abilities or skills.
8. **Conference Abstracts** are submitted for consideration for presentation at scientific and medical conferences.
9. **Conference Reports** are a collection of abstracts and papers presented at conferences. They present preliminary research findings and the full results may be published in a journal later.
10. **Commentaries / Debates / Issues / Opinion & Analysis / Perspectives / Views / View Point** are scholarly articles which express a personal opinion or a new and unique viewpoint or perspective about existing research, fundamental concepts, or prevalent notions on a specific topic. They are often invited by the editorial board but may also be spontaneously submitted. They may or may not be peer-reviewed. They propose and support the strengths and weaknesses of a hypothesis or scientific theory. They may challenge the current state of knowledge in a particular field or discuss the implications of a newly implemented innovation. They are often written when the:
 - Data are preliminary, not very significant or not strong enough to convey the message.
 - Topic is of broad concern to a wider audience or to the scholarly community in general.
 - Author wishes to present opinions and ideas or describe an innovation that has not yet been implemented.¹⁵
11. **Current Practices / Current Topics / Frontiers of Technology / Innovation / New Techniques / New Technology / Recent Advances / Trends and Technology** informs about new advancements in the field which have showed promising results.
12. **Editorials** are expert opinions on a topical issue and may be written by the editorial boards or by a guest on their behalf. They provide an opportunity to reflect on a recent event, methodological innovation, or gap in the literature.
13. **Ethics** section features articles on ethical aspects of health care. These are useful for health care professionals, members of institutional review boards, medical ethicists, researchers, bio-scientists, policy makers as well as patients.
14. **Field Medicine** is a category of battlefield/military medicine/field surgery/combat casualty care. It primarily pertains to is the treatment of wounded combatants and non-combatants in or near an area of combat.
15. **History of Science** deals with the study of the development of science from ancient times to the present.
16. **Letters** are sent by interested readers to the editor of a journal to clarify, discuss or comment on content presented recently in the journal. Often letters commenting on specific topics are also accepted.¹⁶
17. **Rapid Communications / Short Articles / Short Communications / Short Reports** are short scientific papers that are based on original, interesting, significant yet preliminary findings which may lose relevance if published after a long time. Their material is time-sensitive and are therefore published swiftly for rapid dissemination to the academic community.¹⁷
18. **Special Articles / Special Communications** are collections of research notes that address a particular topic or issue that people are facing.
19. **Student's Section/ Student's Corner** provides a platform to students for sharing their work.
20. **Studies Protocol** include experiments, surveys, questionnaires, interviews, case studies, participant and non-participant observation, observational trials etc. As regards types of studies, these included:
 - a. **Case Reports** are detailed reports of the symptoms, signs, diagnosis, treatment and follow-up of an individual patient and may also contain

some demographic information about the patient like age, gender, ethnic origin. They usually describe an unusual or novel occurrence.¹⁸

- b. **Case Series** are a group or series of case reports involving patients who were given similar treatment. They help identify natural course of diseases, in recognizing the emergence of epidemics and in recognizing uncommon risk factors. They usually contain detailed demographic information about the individual patients like age, gender, ethnic origin) as well as information on diagnosis, treatment, response to treatment and follow-up after treatment.¹⁸
- c. **Drug Trials** are rigorously controlled tests of a new drug or a new invasive medical device on human subjects.
- d. **Meta-Analysis** is the examination of data from a number of independent studies in order to determine overall trends.
- e. **Review Articles** summarize the state of understanding on a topic by surveying previously published studies, instead of reporting new facts or analysis.
- f. **Mini Reviews** are literature reviews that highlight a particular topic or series of linked topics in a quick and easy way, highlighting where the gaps are in the literature and highlighting where there are areas for research development.
- g. **Narrative Reviews** aim at identifying and summarizing what has been previously published, avoiding duplications and seeking new study areas not yet addressed.¹⁹
- h. **Surveys** are sent by researchers to survey participants. The data collected is then analyzed to draw meaningful research conclusions.
- i. **Systematic Reviews** key characteristics includes “a clearly stated set of objectives with pre-defined eligibility criteria for the studies, an explicit reproducible methodology, a systematic search that attempts to identify all the studies that would meet the eligibility criteria, an assessment of the findings of the included studies and a systematic presentation and synthesis of the characteristics and findings of the included studies”.²⁰

21. **Unforgettable Experiences** occur as a result of any health care related experience or event which may be positive or negative.

Journals vary in their preference for publishing scholarly articles. It is therefore best for authors to:

- Look at the desired journal’s ‘instructions for authors’ section.
- Read a few articles published in their chosen category.
- Send a pre-submission inquiry to journals that publish articles by invitation only and do not accept unsolicited submissions in certain category.
- Understand that the requisite knowledge, originality and quality are mandatory for all type of articles.

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CONCLUSION

Research is an overwhelming and tedious enterprise. Stepping into the world of research demands significant investment of time and energy. Undertaking research, converting it into an original article and getting it published in a journal of repute are all painstaking feats. Early career researchers need to understand that writing non-research articles (other than original publications) should not be looked down upon by them as a shortcut or an easy way out. These articles have the potential to act as a safety lid to release the immense pressure on them so that instead of the mantra ‘publish or perish’, they happily hum the tune ‘publish and flourish’.

Conflict of Interest: None.

Author’s Contribution:

SSNZ: Conception, design, initial design, NB: Methodology, data analysis, SAS: Data collection, references, literature review, SM: Data analysis, final draft, references, FA: Data analysis, literature research. SMHK: Intellectual contribution.

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