

CHALLENGES OF STARTING A NEW MEDICAL JOURNAL

Irfan Shah

Department of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery, Dental College HITEC-IMS, Taxila, Pakistan

Are you planning to start a new scientific medical journal? Great! Yes, for sure it will be great service to the medical profession, medical research, your institution as well as to all those who would like to publish their scientific work in a high-quality medical journal.

Like all other new enterprises, starting and running a successful good quality peer-reviewed biomedical scientific journal, however, presents a variety of challenges^{1,2}. Designating an editorial board, legal and ethical imperatives, getting recognition from national and international regulatory bodies, financial viability and last but not the least convincing potential researchers and authors to submit their scientific work for publication in the new (yet not-well-known) journal are some of the major challenges.

First and foremost, a vibrant editorial board must be established that comprises members with active and current research credentials. A journal's quality is only as good as its editorial board, advisory board, and reviewers. Ideally, the members should have good visibility and collaborative relationships with researchers in their shared areas of interest. The Editor-in-Chief should not only have good leadership qualities but must also have good relationships with research communities and leaders, nationally and internationally. Most importantly, these members should be able to dedicate time to the journal above and beyond their on-going engagements.

Once the key personnel are in place, an office with supporting clerical staff should be set up. The

initial administrative tasks may include designing an impactful website, engaging a professional manuscript management system (software), applying for ISSN number (or two ISSN numbers in case of both print and online publications).

Several decisions must be made after thorough deliberation. These include, but are not limited to, understanding the legal requirements of both local and international bodies of standards, frequency of publication (annual, bi-annual, quarterly, monthly etc.), type of Peer Review system to be used (single blind, double blind, or open peer review) and type of research (original research, reviews, clinical case-studies etc.)

The International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) recommends a journal format standard wherein each manuscript should comprise at least 7 components (Structured Abstract, Introduction, Methodology, Results, Analysis, Discussion, and Conclusion)³. Authors should be mandated to follow this standard. Furthermore, authors should be required to declare their conflicts of interest and sources of funding, if any.

The journal website should provide comprehensive and detailed guidelines to authors. All the limitations and conditions (word limit, page limit, maximum figures/tables etc.) should be clearly visible. Additionally, policies regarding plagiarism should be clearly elucidated. Last, but not the least, details about processing fees, publication charges, likely time to submission for review and likely

time to publication should be prominently displayed to ensure transparency.

There are numerous databases that index internationally recognized journals. The editorial team must endeavour to get the journal registered and indexed in these databases (Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), Medline PubMed, PubMed Central, Scopus etc.).

Recognition by local bodies like Pakistan Medical Commission (PMC) and Higher Education Commission (HEC) can

CAPSULE SUMMARY

The challenging steps of starting & running a biomedical journal include :

- Designating an editorial board
- Legal imperatives; getting NOC and Declaration from Government agencies
- Obtaining recognition from international regulatory bodies; ISSN number and indexation in databases
- Obtaining recognition from national regulatory bodies; HEC/PMC
- Financial viability
- Designing an impactful website
- Engaging a professional manuscript management system
- Persuading the potential researchers to submit their scientific work

Correspondence to: Prof. Dr. Irfan Shah, Principal, Dental College HITEC-IMS, Taxila Cantt.

Email: drshah121@hotmail.com

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contribute to local acceptance. Down the line, recognition by Clarivate Analytics, getting an impact factor and application for a DOI number are important landmarks that ensure the credibility, visibility, and readership of a journal internationally.

The journal should subscribe to and purchase software tools that would ensure good quality English language and grammar as a supplement to reviewers and editors. Furthermore, the journal will have to subscribe to plagiarism checking software (like Turnitin) to screen all manuscripts.

The journal should ensure adequate funding to sustain itself. Funding sources may include university funds, government grants, support from HEC, subscription charges and/or advertisements.

One major challenge faced by a new journal is to get articles for publication from authors and researchers⁴. Getting recognition from PMC, HEC and Indexation mostly requires time and only come after successful publication of several issues. It is during this time that most authors are hesitant to submit their articles to a new journal and it is very difficult to find articles with authentic scientific data. It takes personal contacts to convince authors for submissions. It would be wise to collect scientific articles for at least two issues before bringing out the first issue. This will not only make bringing out the second issue easier but

will also give the editors ample time for collecting manuscripts for the third and then subsequent issues.

Starting and maintaining a journal requires a substantial commitment in terms of capital and human resource. Unless the journal is backed by an institute that can finance and support this endeavour and people who have interest in research and ability to overcome the challenges listed above, it is impossible to sustain a credible and recognized journal on a long-term basis. However, once all these challenges have been overcome, successful publication of each volume over the years makes the efforts exerted and resources allocated worth it.

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