

EDITORIAL

The Birth of BMB

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The BMB was born ten years ago; during this period it has accomplished a high standard of publication, and it has managed to be indexed.

When it was established, the majority of the Board of Editors had no editorial training, and most of them had not written any article in their lifetime, the only armament they had was the enthusiasm to produce a very much needed medical journal in an area which lacks research and basic medical statistics. Faced with this type of Editors the majority of authors in Bahrain English represent the second language and 90% of them had no research or writing training, in addition to that Research and publication does not represent an important asset for promotion by the health authorities.

In the midst of this we had to start: faced with this tremendous challenge we had to proceed, therefore recognising first our disability we decided to extensively read and attend training courses to improve our ability in this field. Through the British Council we attended an educational visit arranged by the Central Office of Information in Britain, the visit comprised of meeting the editors of the following journals – Health Trends, New Scientist, British Medical Journal, Lancet, Prescriber, New Horizon and others. As well, since our establishment we made it a rule that every seminar or conference arranged by EASE, two members of the BMB will attend and come back and tell the others what they have learned.

Since early establishment of the Bahrain Medical Bulletin, we adopted a uniform requirement for manuscripts submitted to biomedical journals as proposed in Vancouver in 1979. Unfortunately most of our authors were not acquainted with this, besides some of our editors did not understand it and others did not agree with it, but after a period we managed to convince all the editors that this is the best method and the easiest in order to judge an article, and to have a uniform style, rather than to have a different style of publication in the same issue.

As far as the authors, they took more time and more efforts to be convinced to conform with the style which has been agreed upon in Vancouver. This has been achieved through author-editor discussions, seminars and conferences arranged by the Bahrain Medical Bulletin.

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To establish a Peer Review Pool was another problem, because of the lack of experience of the Medical Community in this aspect. Therefore sending the paper for Review was mostly a waste of time. Improper evaluation is the rule, most of the time we receive: this paper is good; this paper is bad, mostly the opinion was reflecting the personal liking and disliking of the referee. We were not able to solve this until we had adopted the British Medical Journal guidance (with a little modification) for referee, which deals with the following :

1. Originality
2. Scientific Reliability
 - a. Overall design
 - b. Patients studied
 - c. Methods
 - d. Results
 - e. Interpretations and conclusions
3. Importance of the work.
4. Suitability for Bahrain Medical Bulletin
5. Ethical aspects
6. Sound statistical results
7. English writing and style

After that we have not solved all our problems with Peer Review, but we were able to tell whether the referee's comments were objective or not.

We have found that it is of great benefit to discuss our Peer Review guidelines with the authors; it does make them comprehend what is needed in an article, it makes them more careful in writing, precise, adhere to the ethics and more careful with their statistical interpretation.

To further the training of our editors, we have arranged one academic meeting after each publication, the purpose of that meeting is to critically evaluate what has been published in the previous issue and then to compare that evaluation with the critical evaluation which is done by an international referee, Dr W Whimster from King's hospital. Realising the handicap of the authors we decided not to reject any article unless it is scientifically unsound or ethically unacceptable. Therefore we have devoted a lot of our time to meet the authors and to instruct them and to discuss with them until we make their article suitable for publication.

We found very few people resent this method, and we also noticed that most of those who resent it are paranoid, most of the time they do not realise their mistakes, and they are not willing to admit that they have made one.

In case of dispute between authors and editors or between two editors the article is sent to international Peer Review who might give the final say in the dispute.

In order to widen the base of authorship from very few who are able to write to many who will be willing, we arranged six workshops on medical writing and research, two of

them with the co-operation of British Medical Journal, and one with the Harvard Medical School and three with local experts. These workshops were well attended and they have roused the interest of those who are able to write and those who are not.

As we said in the beginning, research and publication is not mandatory for promotion, therefore we have to encourage research by arousing the academic endeavour, in order to do that we established a Research Advisory Panel which is composed of academicians from the medical school and chaired by one of our members, the main function is to advise researchers during their planning, during interpretation of results and on publication.

The Research Advisory Panel had established a link with the Research Centre in Bahrain and is considered as an advisor to the Research Centre on Medical issues. In order to enlarge the circle further, three years ago we have invited the editors of the Arabian Gulf medical journals to establish Gulf scientific editors, and after several meetings we failed because of the narrow mindedness and personal interest, but we have managed to have good liaison with all Gulf medical journals and with many international journals such as British Medical Journal.

Through our efforts to improve the editors and to enlarge the circle of authors we managed to have a waiting list of six months compared to previously, where we used to beg the authors to write for us. This is the story of the struggle against the odds but it can be seen that the Bulletin has managed to survive and to be indexed, managed to increase the flow of articles, managed to train authors and managed to keep a high standard of scientific publication through systematic training of editors and authors alike.