

EDITORIAL

Research in medical sciences: scenario in Assam

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Medical Council of India has fixed the minimum eligibility criteria for faculties in medical colleges serving in various posts.

After the notification, it became mandatory for all the faculties to publish their research papers in the journals indexed in the specified indexing agencies and it is not possible to go to a higher posts or promotions if a faculty is not having the requisite number of research publication in his or her credit.

So it has become a necessity for the faculties to publish their research articles in the journals indexed with the specified indexing agencies prescribed by the MCI and the result of such mandatory publication are

- Quality of the publication is going down
- Rise of predatory journals
- Salami publications
- Stealing of authorship
- Ghost authors and many more.

In this regard one has to understand that, if any research article is not based on proper scientific research maintaining all the protocols for that particular research or is based on some fake reproduced data, it will not only cheat the readers of that particular article but also will have much more negative effects as the data may be incorporated in some systemic review or meta-analysis which will give a totally wrong findings based on those data. Also think of the impact if it is related to some drug trial or therapy, it which will have a far reaching consequences.

So, it is always expected that all faculties to maintain at least the minimum standard for their research publications and to choose the journals maintaining the minimum standard for the publications.

However, under the compulsion of publication it is observed that there is a rise of unethical practice in the research publications. At the same time some of the journals are taking advantage of the situation and making money out of this issue.

If we see the global scenario, there has been rise in research activities all around the globe, but of late, China has come out to be the front runner amongst all the new researchers.

India was at par in terms of research publications till last few years but China has passed India now. There is a rise in Chinese publication rates of late with a number of Universities emerging amongst the top universities of the world and the main reason for such growth is the building of infrastructure, training of manpower to use those infrastructure as well as providing the proper facilities and fund for the research works.

However, in India, we are trying to get more and more research activities with construction of the infrastructure for the same in last few years, but not getting the required results.

Particularly in the field of medical science, there is always lack of infrastructure for proper research which is not adequate for the researchers to achieve the goal. Many a time if there is some good infrastructure in some places, proper man power is not available to utilise the same. This is because of the lack of proper initiative from the Government to place the right person in the right place. In a Government system, there is always nepotism, slow progress of work and lack of proper planning, which hinders the progress of research activities.

Another important aspect for creating a proper environment for research is discussions amongst the faculties with their counterparts which enhances the dissemination of knowledge and also encourage the researchers to get in to some research activities. This can be achieved by attending various conferences, symposiums, seminars, etc., which is also lacking in many faculties.

If we take the example of Assam, which is having now seven medical colleges, with around 1500 faculties in them, the number of research publications from these medical colleges having high impact factor are only few. Now what may be the cause behind such apathetic condition. Is it

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because of lack of initiative from the faculty concern or some other cause?

Now let us analyse the scenario in the medical colleges in the state of Assam-

To enter in to a medical colleges in Assam, one must have a postgraduate qualification and he or she will be promoted to the next level, i.e., as Assistant Professor if there is any vacant post available in the medical colleges as there is no time bound promotion system in Assam.

After serving as Assistant Professor for four years and with two publications in an indexed journal as prescribed by the MCI, he or she may be promoted to the Associate professor and similarly after three years as Associate Professor and with two more research publications, with one international publication, he or she will become Professor in a medical college in Assam, provided there is a vacant post available.

So, it is not certain that one will be able to get his or her promotion in time, in spite of fulfilling the prescribed criteria, resulting in stagnation and demoralisation of the faculties who are deprived.

Moreover, there is no point system out of the publications based on the impact factor or so, which resulted in demoralisation of the actual researchers who have done it spending money and time in the research and published the same in high impact journals.

Another important hindrance in the field of research is the absence of transparency in the transfer of the faculties as there is no clear cut guidelines for transferring a faculty from one college to other in Assam. It is done as per the whim of the Government or to be precise the bureaucrats or the minister concerned. Many of the faculties who can maintain a good relation with those at secretariat are seen passing their time in the same colleges year after year and some have to roam around from one college to other as they are not able or did not bother to please those mentioned. So, if a faculty is engaged in some research projects, he or she may have to leave it in the middle of the project. He or she cannot even plan for a project which he or she can finish during their tenure in that particular period, as there is no such roster for transfer of faculties and it is one of the major hurdle in the field of research in the medical colleges in Assam.

Any research will perish if not published in a good journal or presented in a good conference. But there is no or very little support from the Government for attending conferences. Many a time it is seen that, the faculties had to ask for casual leave or earned leave for attending the conferences as there is no provision for any kind of special leave for

the same, not to speak of the financial support for attending the conferences. In this regard, the AIIMS or similar central government institutions have very clear cut guidelines including on duty leave for attending conferences up to 42 days. T.A., D.A., hotel accommodation and registration fee for minimum two national conferences per year and one international conference in two year in lower level faculties and up to four national and one international conferences per year for the level of a professor is provided. The Government of Assam can adopt such a principle which will be beneficial for the faculty development.

Many of the faculties are not aware of the funding agencies to manage the fund for their research, so they cannot go for any extramural grant to meet up the fund for their research activities. The faculties who manage some research grants from some funding agencies also many a time face problem due to frequent transfer as Assam is not having a fair transfer policy for transferring a medical faculty from one institution to other as mentioned above.

There is also a lack of awareness amongst the faculties regarding the funding agencies and many of the research projects are rejected at the very initial stage by the funding agencies as the proposals are not prepared in proper format or are not that attractive to attract the grants. So, there needs to be a proper awareness drive for getting the research grants and it is good to see that of late, there has been massive effort in this field, the IJHRMLP being the front runner along with the Srimanta Sankaradeva University of Health Sciences, Assam.

Of late, there has been little improvement in the field of research due to setting up of the Central research labs in some of the medical colleges, but only few are being utilised to its optimum, may be due to lack of initiative from the administration as well as the concerned faculties.

So, we can hope that there will be increase in good research and publications in the medical field and more particularly from Assam with proper initiative and facilities from the Government side as well as motivation from the faculties towards research.

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