



THE PRESSURE OF PUBLICATION

PROFILE



TEXT BY

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*Disclaimer :
The above information is entirely the opinion of the writer who is a clinician and a researcher. It does not necessarily reflect the views of other clinicians, clinician researchers, scientists and the organisations which he works in.*

PUBLISHING MEDICAL LITERATURE

Medical science is ever evolving. As clinicians, we have never stopped yearning for further improvement of the current diagnostic, therapeutic and prognostication paradigms that carry too many limitations, to enhance our patients' survival rates and quality of life. As such, advanced knowledge needs to be disseminated such that new diagnostic tests, therapeutic agents and prognostic biomarkers can reach the medical communities and ultimately benefit our patients. Timely publication of medical literature is one of the most effective ways to disseminate new information and knowledge for subsequent implementation and revalidation. To ensure the accuracy, accountability, integrity and validity of the research data, manuscripts submitted to journals are usually vigorously peer reviewed and substantially revised before acceptance and publication. If clinicians have the ambition to contribute seriously to the medical literature that aims to ultimately benefit patients, pressure and frustration of varying degrees are expected while going through the process of planning, conducting, presenting and revising their work.

SOURCES OF PRESSURE Institutions

The number and impact of publications almost always play a critical role in

determining the reputation of academic institutions, at least in the research domain. Particularly for researchers who hold academic appointments that are tagged with a tenure clock, the quantity and quality of publications will obviously be one of the most important indicators that determine the path and fate of their academic careers.

Supervisors

Not limited to academic institutions, many clinical institutions nowadays expect their clinicians to publish papers amid their heavy clinical duty, with an aim to fulfil some predetermined key performance indicators. Serious supervisors always require their students and fellows of the team to publish in order to raise their reputations. In turn, the supervisors are assessed annually based on their collaborative work within their teams and with others.

Researchers

Ambitious researchers always automatically push themselves to publish more papers, and faster, because the impact of publishing novel data is generally higher. In addition, impactful research proposals invariably require good research funding. A sound track record of publications is almost always a decisive factor in securing research funding. The deleterious impacts as a result of failure in securing sufficient research funding on principal investigators are not difficult to imagine.

POTENTIAL CONSEQUENCES

Too much stress and pressure will hamper the productivity of research. At the same time, if productivity is to be maintained under an exceedingly stressed milieu, the quality, accountability and integrity of publications may be compromised to a certain extent. This may explain why the number of retracted articles has increased tenfold in the past decade despite the fact that the literature has only expanded by 44%.¹

PRACTICAL TIPS TO ALLEVIATE PRESSURE

Identify your reasons for publishing

The ideal reason for publishing that one should aim for has been described in the first paragraph. If your aim is to enrich the knowledge of the medical literature, do so at your own pace and do not let too much pressure disintegrate

your ambition. If your aim is to solely expand the number of your publications and enrich your CV regardless of whether your research serves to advance the medical literature, you will need to be more receptive to pressure.

Identify what kind of person you are

Pressures are perceived differently by different people. Thus, you need to be aware of how much stress you anticipate and can endure. Set a reachable goal – a goal which you can maintain your interest in doing meaningful research with minimal stress. For junior clinicians, set a realistic goal with your supervisors as to what your comfortable level is regarding the number and impact of publications. You (and your supervisor) need to know that your main job is still looking after your patients and they always come first despite your overwhelming commitment to research.

CONCLUDING WORDS

Lastly, institutions should put more emphasis on the critical importance of the quality and integrity of publications instead of just the quantity. If the topic and direction of the research is tasked to answer critical clinical and scientific questions, proper implementation of such research based on principles of ethics and good clinical practice should be able to generate results of reasonable impact and number. As such, the pressure of tracing the numbers and quality of your research would be greatly mitigated. ♦

References

1. Van Noorden R. Science publishing: The trouble with retractions. *Nature* 2011; 478(7367):26-8.