Medical editing is undergoing tremendous changes. The routine protocols are being re-visited and new ideas are being incorporated in the era of rapid technological advances. The field is developing in such a way so as to become a discipline that stands out radically alone. Traditionally in Pakistan and elsewhere, the editors of medical journals were inducted only on their desire to be part of editorial boards. There was no formal training and all learning was done on-job. This trend continued but at present some quarters object to this type of induction into the field. A more formal recruitment and training is, therefore, suggested.1

In the neighbouring country Iran, a formal course in medical journalism was started in Shiraz University in the year 2009 in order to introduce an objective, structure and professionally oriented training in medical journalism. Dr. Behrooz Astaneh, who himself was trained in medical journalism at the United Kingdom had conceived this idea. The outline of the course is such that aspiring candidates undergo extensive training in various fields of medical journalism.2 The course comprises of different modules including epidemiology, biostatistics, on-line production etc. The need of command over English was also addressed as it is a need of non-English speaking countries. In addition to routine processes of medical editing namely copy editing, design and layout, law related to media and publications are also introduced.2 Similar programs are also offered in some other countries and internship at journals offices, is also available. Though it appears quite logical to have a more structured training program in medical journalism but will it be of benefit, is questioned by some.3

In contrast to a formal training, another model is to expose those who have an interest in medical editing, to processes that are taking place at a journal’s office under the supervision of senior editors, but in a more supervised fashion. Thus, it differs in a strict sense from traditional model where no formal training is offered. The candidates experience the editorial protocols including peer-review processes. They edit manuscripts and are involved in copy editing and communicating with authors. Thus, a type of mentorship is created and it is expected to deliver as well. Thus, such a goal-oriented collaboration may result in the achievement of properly trained juniors, who can then be inducted formally into editorial boards.4

The editors of journals are also facing greater challenges in the context of strong pharmaceutical industry presence in the field of research, increasing plagiarism and technical advancements. The originality of research, documentation of results, competing interests of researchers and their collaboration with industry, all require to be vigorously scrutinized by the editors. Thus, promotion of transparency in research and its reporting is now seen as one of the duties of journals’ editors. To ensure a true and well-structured research that addresses gaps in knowledge, editors in collaboration with central research advisory boards have devised many protocols and guidelines. Editors from developing countries must keep themselves abreast with the changes and ensure that the same rigorous procedures are followed while reporting results in their own journals. The funds thus shall be utilized judiciously and redundant and duplicate publications are discouraged.

The peer review processes are also becoming increasingly challenging and many journals have adopted open peer review procedure rather than traditional blind peer review. Though significant results are not reported, yet the open peer review and publishing details of the procedure on-line inculcates a culture of accountability on the part of reviewers as well. Authors’ perspective is usually subdued and their rights as to the decisions made by editorial boards are not found as a document on websites of journals. This is now being realized as a necessity and journals must ensure that authors’ grievances are addressed at a proper forum.5

The opinion of readers of the journals are also important. Creation of such web blogs helps in improving the journals’ deficiencies. Readers are important stakeholders. Their needs and expectations cannot be ignored otherwise usefulness of a journal is questioned. Finally, editors of the journals can play an important role in influencing policy decisions of various governments and other policy makers, by appropriate lobbying and advocacy. If important outcome of a research does not reach the quarters where future decisions are made in relation to health and related fields, then it becomes a fruitless exercise. By circulating important findings through print and electronic popular

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media, journals can become part of groups seeking improvement in national health indices. Periodical meetings of editors of journals help in exchanging views and mutual learning as well as identifying future challenges and planning strategies to deal with them. One such conference was held in the first week of December 2010 at the College of Physicians and Surgeons Pakistan (CPSP), Karachi, jointly organized by Pakistan Association of Medical Editors and World Health Organization Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR) in collaboration with Ministry of Health, CPSP, Dow University of Health Sciences and the Aga Khan University. Deliberations were made on challenges in medical journalism faced by the editors of the journals in EMR. Visibility of journals at international forum was also discussed in depth and various strategies were planned to help regional journals to achieve international recognition so that the published research is made available to scientists of the world. It is hoped that recommendations of the conference will provide a pathway for editors to bring positive changes in the policies of the journals and realize their responsibilities as well. JCPSP, the highest impact factor biomedical journal from Pakistan, in this regard shall continue to extend services and help by providing collaboration and much needed assistance to national and regional non-indexed journals in improving their quality and visibility.

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