Recognizing Ayurveda journals: Who will bell the cat?

Dear Editor,

This has a reference to a correspondence of Muthappan and colleagues on ‘Recognized journals in guidelines of Central Council of Indian Medicine on research publications need specification’ published in a recent issue of JAIM [1]. The correspondence tried to give voice to the concerns of many Ayurveda fraternity who feel deceived through inappropriate explanations by appointing authorities, of loosely defined terms on career promotion matters eventually giving a scope for breaches and allowances for infiltration of sub-standard practices. There is however much more to look and deal with merely seeking the expansion of ‘recognized journals’ in Ayurveda. While appreciating CCIM for its intentions in mentioning ‘recognized journals’ as a parameter to differentiate between good, scholarly and original work and a casual, non original, cut-paste publication, we do submit that not moving beyond the mention of the term actually failed to serve the real purpose of bringing such distinctions in practice. In the absence of clear guidelines to define the recognized journals, the whole idea of distinguishing and rewarding scholarly publishing remained superficial and open to be distorted as per the individual opinions of the authorities while defining the term concerned.

What a recognized journal should mean? Why recognition should be given to a journal? Naturally the recognition of a journal implies to be of the practices being adopted by it for the purpose of scholarly publishing. These practices are eventually the standard and dynamic practices of scientific publishing laid by the national and international authorities in the field. Upon following such standard benchmarks of publishing, these journals may be given recognition about their adherence to the highest standards of publishing and this recognition in its essence should come from an authority organization deeply involved in the area of benchmarking of standards of scholarly publishing in the particular segment of knowledge.

The job of recognizing a journal is contemporarily done by the indexing authorities. After Extensive reviewing of the process of publication adopted by a journal, the indexing authorities confirm to its International scientific publishing standards and decide to list it or not in their list of quality journals. Therefore, getting indexed by an international indexing authority itself is a great appraisal for a journal which eventually reflects on the recognition of its practices adopted for publishing.

Among the composite components of the review process, International indexing bodies listed the scientific journals, primarily focused on the originality and the generalizability (external validity and also the possibility of connecting to a diverse readership) of the contents being published. A high note is also taken about the peer review policy, intolerance to plagiarism and editorial board composition including the credentials of board members in the area of scientific publishing. Owing to the high standards and critical review procedures, many Indian journals fail to obtain such recognition from international indexing bodies like PubMed and Scopus. As an Indian alternative to global indexes, Ind MED, an ICMR initiative was launched in India in 1985 to give recognition to Indian scientific journals [2]. It has listed about 100 journals so far belonging to biomedicine. As per the mandate, ICMR-NIC Centre for Biomedical Information was to support services to medical research community. They did not have AYUSH in the schema of things and therefore are not of much help in the matter of recognizing Ayurveda journals.

In similar lines, UGC also came forward to identify the standard journals by proposing a list of journals belonging to various streams of knowledge. This list was made by inviting the recommendations from university faculties about the standard journals in their respective fields. As this list was based upon the recommendations alone without any operational mechanism of actually looking into the sanctity of the recommendations, it was not a foolproof and had the inclusion of many predatory and substandard entries [3]. Similar contexts may also be seen at various higher/technical education regulatory authorities like Medical Council of India (MCI), Dental Council of India (DCI), All India Council for technical Education (AICTE) and Veterinary Council of India (VCI) etc. referring to the publishing standards and standard journals in their respective area of knowledge.

Now, in this perplexing scenario, it is important to address the following questions; What a recognized journal pertaining to Ayurveda should comprise of? And who may eventually emerge, as an authority of recognition? Obviously, the definition of recognized journals in Ayurveda and the process involved therein, should be able to accommodate the inherent difficulties of publishing in Ayurveda being faced currently and should be able to filter the best among the presently available ones [4].

In this perspective, the first onus of defining the standards of Ayurveda journals that eventually help in defining the recognized journals, should lie on the independent professional forums of Ayurveda that are acting as the publishers and the journal content owners [5]. It may be a self recognition and compliance of predefined standards of publication practices by the individual professional bodies acting as publishers, that are felt essential in order to keep the journal standing high among peers in a respective field. Subsequently, as a next step, a forum of self motivated professionals involved in editing, reviewing and publishing may be asked to come out with a consensus document defining the publishing standards in Ayurveda. Such consensus document may be made open for comments from peers and has to undergo subsequent revisions to make it most practical and viable. Eventually, as an outcome of the process, a position paper may be published stating the contemporary standards of publishing.
in Ayurveda. The best to begin with, could have been the formation of a guild of editors involved in Ayurveda or AYUSH journal publications to eventually act as a formal body for enlisting all those adhering to the perceived standards and qualifying to be called as recognized journals. This seems to be one immediate step which can be taken to handle the existing publication hoax among Ayurveda journals and to give a breathing space to those who are already working genuinely.

This would however not be overemphasized that to reach to the real standards of scholarly publishing, Ayurveda requires to work at many fronts simultaneously. This is obvious to note that a journal cannot survive in the absence of quality submissions and meticulous peer reviewing. Ayurveda journals largely suffer on both of these fronts and hence a culture abiding value of the scientific writing and its critical review is urgently required. A journal in the field mirrors to what is actually being done at the segment. It also represents the values that society is adhering to scholarly writing. Practicing for valuing and rewarding the good work therefore is the path which leads to the existence and survival of standard journals. Once we reach this culture in Ayurveda, the problem of recognizing a journal possibly would not exist.

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References

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