

Editorial**Bahrain Medical Bulletin - Survival Issues**

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Bahrain Medical Bulletin (BMB) still facing survival difficulties, though, it was established in 1979, as a local journal. It is published by an independent board of editors made of scientists/physicians. The editors' main aims are to maintain reasonable quality and standard, provide a podium for local publishable works, and attempt to gain entrance into the international network by fulfilling the requirements of the publishers and international database indexers. BMB has become the second medical journal in the Arabian Gulf region. It has been recognized internationally and regionally but still facing many difficulties, financially and otherwise. The BMB is constantly under the threat from position holders. It is difficult to explain all this antagonism to scientific progress and publication in a country that needs it and can afford it.

Bahrain Medical Bulletin is edited by a group of voluntary dedicated scientist/physicians who have received their postgraduate medical training and qualifications in Europe and North America. Their interest in research and publication continued unabated, though, the editors of the journal are not rewarded. Through the dedicated efforts of these editors, BMB became the second medical journal - after Kuwait - to be published in the Gulf Co-operation Council countries.

Those scientists/physicians, at the time of their postgraduate training, were under the impression that part of the petro-dollars will be channeled to research in science and medicine. Sooner than later, they discovered that they were marginalized with other intellectuals especially if they are from the unprivileged group. The uneducated, the incompetent and the greedy became the advisors in everything including medicine.

BMB publish four issues per year with no interruption and currently indexed in the WHO Index Medicus for Eastern Mediterranean Region (IMEMR), Extramed of United Kingdom and International Serial Data System of France. It is recognized and accredited by a number of regional and overseas universities.

In addition to the editors, continuous daily reciprocal double-learning activity with authors of submitted works, BMB conducts two workshops every year on scientific writing, editing and research and another seminar on a community related subject of

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national interest. BMB has a Research Advisory Panel to help researchers plan their study and obtain funds for their work. BMB is a member of several science editors associations and maintains its participation in their periodic meetings.

BMB editors were the first to call for the regional formation of an association of Arabian Gulf Editors of Medical Journals, an exercise that failed in the first meeting. But the efforts were successfully rewarded in the formation of Middle East Association of Science Editors (MEASE). The BMB editors are proud to note that the President of MEASE is the assistant chief editor of BMB, Dr Al-Hilli.

Over the last 25 years the Bulletin faced many obstacles that threatens its survival. Some of these obstacles are related to the local reviewers. But the great majority were designed and orchestrated to close the journal. Although, we have survived all adversities, we are still under threat of closure and annihilation by position holders. Why so much antagonism is directed towards scientific progress and achievements?

The BMB survived because of the editors' dedication, neutrality and independence of all local influences in order to maintain scientific and ethical publication. With this background, which gained credibility and respect of the scientific community, we would like to share with you our survival against five odds related to conditions of our editors, reviewers, finances, conspiracies, and the local research funding.

Editors

The BMB editors receive no payment or any kind of remuneration. Their positions as editors are not considered in their job promotion. Furthermore, in the case of local journals they frequently shoulder other time-consuming duties such as proofreading, office management, distribution of the journal, public relations, advertisement, subscription, etc. Actually, the editors are persecuted for their intellectual work. They are considered to be "wasting time". Their effort is not accredited by their employers or recognized by local academic and service institutions.

The editors' crime is being creative and productive in a society based on loyalty, nothing counts more than that. Non-professionals who praise the system daily are recognized, and are rewarded lavishly, while medical editors never have been recognized. In short, it is safe to say that science is not on the agenda. What is amazing is that despite all the frustrations, some of the editors continued and never gave up?

Reviewers

The reviewers in our region are a difficult group to deal with, we suppose in other areas as well, but ours are tragic. All our reviewers are consultants and professors in their field of medicine. Unfortunately, many of them have poor English. Therefore, their reviews are worthless, since our publication is in English. Some delegate the assigned paper to their juniors and without hesitancy sign the review report. Other reviewers lack the basic skills of reviewing with few willing to upgrade their skills, knowledge and expertise in that field. Over seventy five percent are not able to check the reference sequence between

text and the list of bibliography or the relevance of reference to the subject under discussion. They barely know how to check the references in any international database index.

Reviewers' bias is unlimited; some are willing to overlook their own friends' mistakes and recommend a low quality paper for publication. To avoid such a mess, each paper is assessed by three independent reviewers and a fourth from our board of editors with the chief editor reviewing all papers. For further scrutiny, we had engaged the late Professor Bill Whimster of King's College Hospital, School of Medicine in London to review all the papers that received unsatisfactory reviews. However, we must say that some of our reviewers are quite good and dedicated and some managed to learn the skills of reviewing. Since our reviewers are not compensated for their efforts, how can we blame them?

Finances

Bahrain Medical Bulletin cannot afford to rent an office because it has no regular income and it remains vegetative to whichever organization agrees to house it, but with no conditions. However, in our region there is always a change of heart, since we are under the mercy of brutal administrators blessed by their superiors for evicting us with no notice. Thus over the last 25 years we had to change office eight times. Each time all our belongings including the “valuable research papers” are thrown out in the blazing heat of Bahrain. Our last office was at The University and the final blow came in 2002, when the same University gave us an ultimatum to vacate the office within three months despite the fact that we are the podium of publication for scientists from this particular institution. After difficult negotiation, we have been given small office hardly accommodating our equipments and not suitable for our meetings – we have to accept because there was no other choice. These acts demonstrate systematic attempts by those in high positions to destroy creative work not only of the Bulletin, but also of scientists?

A major dilemma of local journals such as the Bahrain Medical Bulletin is the lack of financial support, thus, restricting their development, circulation, revenue, advertisement, royalties, subscription, copyright, etc. Since BMB does not generate enough income from advertisement, it depends on donations and subsidies for its existence. It receives an annual assistantship of \$14,600 from three government organizations but it has to beg for it repeatedly - send petitions and reminders. This amount hardly covers the office expenses, noting that 45% of our subsidies are spent on printing and distributing the journal free of charge to the doctors and paramedics of the government organizations in Bahrain and many overseas centers.

BMB income from advertisement is negligible. The international pharmaceutical organizations complain that their research funds are depleted in other countries. Unqualified people, to whom research means nothing more than waste of time and money, own most of the pharmaceutical agencies in our area.

The mockery is that our professionals are not willing to pay the \$8 annual subscription fees, not only for BMB but also for any other journal. Worse yet, many are not willing to

read it or read any other journal, even if given free. A famous pediatrician in our country once said, "Why should I buy and read any journal, the book that I studied Pediatrics in, when I was in medical school, is as good as new? "

What about local publishers taking over? With budding local journals, this is not an easy solution because most of the publishing agencies in our regions are small private enterprises, and not eager to venture their resources into what might be considered "an adventurous" project. They want something of a guaranteed handsome profit and to hell with science and progress.

Conspiracies

At various times, three government ministers were involved in conspiracy; one blocked an approval of financial remuneration for editors of the Bulletin as "medical journalists" by the cabinet. Another using his administrative power tried unsuccessfully to award the Bulletin to a local medical society. The third refused to provide Bahrain Medical Bulletin with a temporary refuge at times of office eviction. Our colleagues in a government position did conspire. They know that their attained position is not based on their accomplishments, scientific and research creativity or list of publications, but based on their loyalty to the system.

Local Research

The international academic network looks at the importance, merits, quality, and applications of the published works rather than the name of the local journal and from where it is published. Few research studies are done locally because of lacking research budget and grants. Most the research done in this region is a personal endeavor rather than institution.

The progress of science in any country is measured by the number and quality of published works, reflecting the degree of activity and interest in research carried out in the country. It also reflects the commitment of the country to support research programs. Furthermore, the availability of local journals of diverse specialties in any country would also mean a growing and active interest in research.

Bahrain Medical Bulletin had been a member of European association of Science editors (EASE) and international federation of science editors (IFSE) for over 20 years. Now we seek your guidance and advice. We would like to know from you as intellectuals a solution, an insight into our problem, if you have one. We are asking, how could an intellectual survive such surroundings and by what means? How can we overcome such obstacles and survive the future hurdles.

Concluding happy note

The BDF hospital had stopped its subsidy (\$2652) to the BMB for two years, but after difficult negotiation resumed in 2005 and the new director of the hospital promised to look into increasing the subsidy in the future. The ministry of information threatened to stop their subsidy (\$7957) to BMB, but the new minister of information, Dr. Abdul Ghaffar, agreed to resume it. Amid all the frustration and

bad news, a magic moment is revealed by the appointment of the new minister of health, Dr. Nada Haffadh, who because of her understanding of the importance of research in medical progress agreed to double the BMB subsidy and to help in lobbying other organization for financial help.

You are welcome to send your comments or contribution to jmab@batelco.com.bh