TRANSITION SUSTENANCE AND CONTINUITY......

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Environmental, social and behavioural changes across nations have had an impact on global health scenario. Conventional diseases have given way to newer and emerging diseases, influenced by changing lifestyle, environment, natural and man made disasters. To keep pace with the changing disease spectrum medical research has been taking giant strides. Medical microbiologists and infectious disease specialists form an integral part of this changing health environment. Indian Journal of Medical Microbiology (IJMM) is one of the platforms in which many of the scientists and researchers have been publishing reports and reviews of these changing scenes in both basic and applied research.

The journal has moved forward in terms of quality of scientific papers published. It has also reached out to wide readership both through print format and online. Citation and indexing in several national and international indexing bodies has made the journal one of the preferred forums by authors from within the country and outside. In addition to publishing scientific reports in various formats, IJMM also publishes perspectives on medical education, policy matters on infectious diseases and recommendations on health care. The articles have been very carefully chosen edited and presented in the previous issues of the journal. A highly commendable job carried out by Dr Savitri Sharma.

My association with the IJMM has been as a scientific contributor of original articles, reviews, editorials, case reports and book reviews. I moved into the editorial team first as an assistant and then associate editor. My involvement with the working of IJMM was from the periphery as a reviewer and some minor policy decisions. Nuances of the editing process will now have to be carried out with as much diligence and attention to detail as my predecessor did, to keep the academic standards high. Smooth transition, sustenance and aiming for further improvement will be behind the scene activities of the present editorial team of the IJMM. This will be possible by continual submission of articles of high standard of original work, reviews of current advances in the field of medical microbiology and infectious diseases, brief reports, interesting case reports and letters to the editor for quick reporting of preliminary observations or comments on previously published papers.

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I would like to share with the readers the growing concern of the dictum of “publish or perish”. The pressure to publish has assumed significance, not only to be at the forefront in reporting cutting edge technology or disseminating knowledge but also as a necessity to further ones career. All work places and agencies have laid strict criteria linking number of publications with academic achievements for recruitment and promotions. This puts pressure to publish, often leading to hurriedly collected study material to write up a research paper.

Quality of manuscripts submitted to the IJMM has to maintain good scientific standards, a target which has been set by the previous editors and which I hope to continue. Our other endeavour would be to continue to be indexed in as many International and National bodies, to achieve a high impact factor and wide readership not only of microbiologists but of other allied specialties. Keeping this in mind, the selection criteria for acceptance of manuscripts will remain stringent as before and pass through the screening processes and peer review.

Many of you would have realized that the rejection rate of manuscripts submitted to IJMM is relatively high. Chances of getting an article published will increase manifold if certain criteria are kept in mind while taking up a study. The end result of any scientific study is to publish the findings in a reputed journal. Attention to details of the study design and methods employed, avoidance of bias and application of correct analytical tools for interpretation increase the acceptability of a manuscript. Innovative techniques and methods must be accompanied by comparison with standard procedures.

IJMM has been receiving several good manuscripts of original work. It will be our endeavour, as has been the practice in the editorial office, to increase the chances of acceptance, by helping the authors to modify their manuscripts through peer review. At the same time authors must follow the instructions published in the January issue or the website, to the minute detail, and to follow the check list before final submission. This is necessary to meet the stringent requirements of the journal. There will not be a compromise on the quality of research papers accepted for the IJMM. Authors are also encouraged to submit manuscripts online, for easier processing as also this cuts cost of postage, delays and loss in transit.

This brings me to another important issue of publication. Authors must be aware of the ethical guidelines related to
scientific research and publication. All research pertaining to human studies must have been cleared by institutional ethical committees, an undertaking to that effect has to be indicated in the manuscript. Conflict of interest, dual publication (simultaneously sending to two or more journals) and plagiarism are some of the darker sides of publication, often led by an ambition to increase the number of research papers for enhancing ones curriculum vitae. The world has witnessed two such scientific frauds in the recent times. In the race to be the first in stem cell research, Hwang Woo Suk of South Korea and Morayama Reyes a PhD scholar from the University of Minnesota fabricated results and took recourse to unethical research and publication practices. It is virtually impossible for the peer reviewers or editors to check the veracity of results of any scientific paper. On the other hand, plagiarism is easily detected by tools available on the net. Author awareness of such incidences help in keeping the journal’s image above board.

Moving on to the infectious disease arena, a gold mine (excuse the pun) of varied experiences by clinical microbiologists across the developing world is waiting to be documented. Outbreaks and epidemics of infections appear almost with clockwork precision in many parts of the globe including India. Scientifically analysed epidemiological data through published papers will contribute to understanding of disease dissemination pattern and perhaps help in preparedness to tackle subsequent outbreaks. Papers documenting these observations would enrich the journal. Some other areas of interest would be write ups on preventive and control strategies of infections encountered in different geographic locations. Basic research on microorganisms and host parasite relationship must be complimented with epidemiological observations.

For any professional in the medical field a case report makes an interesting reading and forms an anecdotal record. A clinical case report is often the result of team effort, comprising one or more clinician/s and the laboratory personnel. It would therefore make sense to have a clinician as a co-author in a case report. Last but not the least, through letters to the editor, authors may respond to published papers with similar or opposite views (backed by supporting references).

With the challenge of shouldering the responsibility of the editorship of IJMM I hope to carry on the work of past editors to the best of my ability. In this onerous task I have the able support of Dr V Lakshmi, Dr Ketoki Kapila and Dr Nandita Banaji. Together we hope to make the team a vibrant, cohesive work force. I take this opportunity to welcome the Members of the Editorial Board whose rich experience in the field of Medical Science will help the journal achieve greater heights of academic excellence. I hope to get the same technical support of electronic wizardry, as before, from the Medknow Publications in general and Dr DK Sahu in particular, the architects of the final product of the journal that reaches all our readers. As a Chinese proverb goes “a journey of thousand miles must begin with a single step” so the editorial team must take the first step with this issue to begin the journey of thousand scientific miles with the IJMM.

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