REFERENCES: FAR FROM UNIFORMITY

Sir,
‘References’ in an article includes the list of articles, books or the communications that have been referred to/consulted in presenting the document. They provide the source of the information being quoted in the article. The International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) has created the Uniform Requirements, primarily to help authors and editors in their mutual task of creating and distributing accurate, clear, easily accessible reports of biomedical studies.[1]

In a broad perspective, two forms of referencing are accepted – the Vancouver system and the Harvard system; but the ‘Reference section’ of the various journal articles has a wide variation in their formatting. The differences include – numbering the list of references, the name of the authors (like use of upper case/lower case for writing the name of the authors, variation in the number of authors to be named individually or being referred to under the rubric of “et al.”), use of punctuations in the reference, the pattern of starting the second line of the reference, the complete and abbreviated name of the journal, use of bolds and italics.

Though all these patterns are consistent with the basic aim of quoting the references, i.e., to give a valid source of the information being quoted in the article, this very issue is a prerequisite to the scientific validity of the document. But the variation in the pattern of the referencing does create some trouble during the submission of the articles to the respective journals. In case one is not fortunate enough to get the nod of the editorial board of one of the journals for the article, one important change he has to make to the article, apart from other changes, is rewriting the reference section according to the next journal for which one is planning to apply. It can be a really taxing job for the author, keeping in mind the possibility of having a uniform agreed-upon pattern of referencing. The uniform pattern may not be impossible to agree upon, though it may be difficult to generate a consensus; and the problem of consensus generation would not be something new to the scientific fraternity, as has been the case in the past.

As such, most of the patterns of referencing are adequate in themselves; the need is to agree upon a specific pattern that incorporates the essence of putting the list of references, i.e., to have a scientific source of the information being quoted. This may help the authors by saving them an effort and time to change from one pattern of referencing to the other while applying to a second journal. Moreover, in light of having an e-listing of the articles, the issue can be more pertinent to be looked upon.

REFERENCE


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