

The Journey of a Journal

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The first journal I ever came across as a medical student was BMJ, the British Medical Journal. I was introduced to this particular journal during the first week of my medical school. As I browsed its online version through www.bmj.com on internet, I instantly got a very attractive web page. The interface was quite vivid and eye catching. The journal was simply awesome in the sense that it had everything a medical student could ask for; from scientific writings to researches, from open forums to blogs and from hot issues in medical schools to discussions of rare diseases. Apparently, it could also be followed on facebook and twitter.

As I went through the journal, I could not stop myself from appreciating its beauty and the meticulous effort that had gone into it. The words and ideas seem to react chemically to produce an extraordinarily beautiful and meaningful piece of work, an exemplary contribution to the scientific arena. Besides, I came to realize that the medical students in the west were capable of describing the events in their hospitals and medical schools in a very striking and precise manner. It seemed like the medicos were writing from anything to everything, just pouring their hearts out. Much to my amazement, they gave attention even to small details that usually go unnoticed at least in our part of the world. It indeed gave a different definition and dimension to traditional way of writing. However, understanding a journal was not a piece of cake. The journal had a different form of language. Initially, there was flooding of new terminologies like the one have during the initial few months of medical school. It took me a great deal of effort to understand the terms like manuscript writing, peer reviewing, formats of an abstract, impact factor, citation and the list went on.

In Nepal, the history of medical journal dates back to 1962. The first journal that ever got published was Journal of Nepal Medical Association (JNMA). It's not been long since the medicos in Nepal have started to get their work published in the journals. Ironically, a few medical students go through the journals and a very few of them write or get their work published. It may have partly been due to the preconceived notion that the journals are for the professionals and the post graduate students. Apart from that, a number of factors seem to be responsible for this. As the medical students always showered with the hectic schedule, the tiring hospital postings, the bulky books, the never ending assessments, the sleepless nights and the pressure for getting good grades, they barely get time for creative writing. In addition to this, one encounters a number of paradigm shifts in a single day; at an instant you are empathizing with a terminally ill patient and the next moment you might land in dealing with the family of the deceased ones or with an overly talkative crazy patient, a traumatized patient or even a hallucinating patient. With this schedule, one can barely get time for creative writing and journals.

Writing is considered as powerful as delivering a speech or a lecture as far as expressing one's view is concerned. Writing is stylish and glamorous; it's a simple way to express yet remarkably effective. No one would know about the scientific accomplishments unless someone puts them into ink and many others interpret it in several hundred ways over years probably throughout the world. So, it is extremely important to encourage medical students in learning the art of writing and habit of going through the journals. But this is not something we are going to be able to do overnight. It will take a great deal of effort and hard work to achieve this. The medical schools do have a significant role to play in nurturing the naïve human minds and encouraging them on creative writing. Holding journal clubs once in a month or two could also be effective in this regard. To put it in a nutshell, nothing should come as a barrier. However, it certainly does not mean forcing or imposing one self to write but at the same time not holding back either when something crosses your mind. The six precious years in medical school should not just end in scalpels and forceps, test tubes and microscopes, creased white coats and cadavers, complicated devices and instruments and wards and OPDs. We, as the students of science, should learn to explore the world, break the barriers and go beyond borders and boundaries.

"Two roads diverged by the woods, I chose the one less travelled by and that has made all the difference....."

-Anonymous