Setitik Peluh, Sebutir Intan: Our Orthopaedic Supplement Journal, A Cause Worth Working For

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What is a journal to the scientific world?

It is a platform where scientific discoveries and work can be displayed to other scientists. It is a place that scientists may be able to find new thoughts and ideas relevant to their field of interest. It is a source that employers and colleagues go to judge the value of a scientist and it is a venue that scientists apply to for self-evaluation and to gain acceptance by respected experts and fellow researchers.

A local journal is a vital training ground for young inexperienced authors and researchers. The steps of processing a tiny pearl into something readable and palatable by others are learned and practised in a more familiar environment where local colleagues have published and it seems the goal is not insurmountable. This is particularly true in the medical world, where a doctor's first priority is his patients and publishing may be a difficult task. A surgeon must also learn and perfect surgical skills, pushing publishing even lower down the priority rungs. A trainee should begin publishing soon after, if not just before completion of his training. This timing would cement in the mind of the trainee the need for published knowledge as a routine output along with other duties of patient care.

Rejection of one's work at an early stage may be devastating to a young surgeon. Yet, acceptance of an article where all articles submitted are printed and the process of selection is lax is not satisfying, either. Thus, the reviewing process of a local medical journal must strike a delicate balance. The reviewers must be selective, to maintain a high standard, yet gentle, encouraging and educational in their comments when rejecting an article or asking for revisions. They must play the role of tutors and guides rather than harsh critics sitting in judgment. Such learned and skilled reviewers are not easy to find and their efforts are applauded.

Editors also play a role in encouraging clinicians to document their successes and failures. They make sure the platform is there and running efficiently so that whatever efforts put in can be processed speedily. They also keep up with new ways of submission that will make the submission process more convenient, keeping in line with the electronic age.

Mentors in this process are vital, to guide a young doctor to a successful completion of a published work. There is a lack of experienced researchers who have published widely and even five years ago, it was a case of the sparsely published leading the unpublished. This is a brave and perilous journey for both parties. The journey towards wisdom is a very slow one.

In Malaysia, we still have a goldmine of information in our patients that remains largely untapped due to our lack of recording the special ways in which they present to us. This information is of interest to the medical world and its publication must be encouraged. To follow case reports, are series of presentations or series of patients treated in novel ways. New approaches to surgical procedures and new techniques can be described with their results.

Courses can be held to improve familiarity with carrying out research and publishing research and interesting case reports. It should become as second nature to us as writing operation notes. Training for reviewers may also be held to encourage and highlight to experienced clinicians that reviewing is a process that requires different skills.

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