

Summary report on the

**Fifth Regional Conference on Medical
Journals (EMMJ5) in the Eastern
Mediterranean Region**

Karachi, Pakistan
3–5 December 2010



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1. Introduction

The Fifth Regional Conference on Medical Journals (EMMJ5) was held in Karachi, Pakistan, from 3 to 5 December 2010. It was organized by the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Pakistan Association of Medical Editors (PAME), in collaboration with the College of Physicians and Surgeons Pakistan, the Eastern Mediterranean Association of Medical Editors (EMAME), Dow University of Health Sciences, Karachi and the Aga Khan University, Karachi. Editors of regularly published and current medical journals, as well as interested health and biomedical researchers, authors, publishers, scientists, assistant editors, copy editors, editorial managers, desktop publishing specialists, editorial assistants, researchers, and authors of medical literature were invited to participate.

The theme of the conference was “Medical journalism: opportunities and challenges in the Eastern Mediterranean Region” and comprised invited talks and free presentations, workshops and two panel sessions and was preceded by pre-conference workshops on medical writing, medical editing and biostatistics. It was attended by around 180 participants.

The conference was opened by Dr Maqbool Jafary, President of the Conference, who welcomed the participants. He noted the many challenges and opportunities facing editors of medical journals and the need to focus on the latter, in particular. The conference presented several relevant opportunities including discussion on how to make

EMAME a thriving and active organization, and how to move forward in creating more training opportunities for editors.

A message was delivered from Dr Hussein A Gezairy, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, by Dr Guido Sabatinelli, WHO Representative for Pakistan. In his message Dr Gezairy noted that the members of EMAME had in common a dedication to dissemination of good quality research, to attracting wider readership, to improving editorial standards, and to improving visibility of their journals in the face of fierce competition, regionally and globally. Achievement of concrete results required clear goals and strategy, and a continuing commitment to interaction. The role of the editor did not stop at publishing research. Editors must also be advocates for research for health. He urged editors who were able to strike alliances with other networks with commonality of purpose, such as the Eastern Mediterranean Evidence-Informed Policy Network (EM-EVIPNet) and the Eastern Mediterranean Region Academic Institutions Network (EMRAIN). With regard to the theme of the conference, he noted that, in times of economic recession, the challenges were particularly acute. Paradoxically, this presented an opportunity to show the vital importance of journals to the dissemination of health research and to the attainment of health for all. He urged editors to make good use of this opportunity.

Professor Rashid Jooma, Director-General of Health, Pakistan, also stressed the importance of consistent quality in medical journal publishing and, in Pakistan, the vital role of the Pakistan Association of Medical Editors in this regard. He highlighted the need for greater awareness among researchers of publishing ethics and better training

in research and writing, as well as for guidelines for editors themselves. He proposed greater collaboration between decision-makers, researchers and editors to establish national standards for medical journals.

Dr Javaid Laghari, Chairman of the Higher Education Commission, Pakistan, underlined the importance of local research and of finding indigenous solutions to problems and highlighted the problems faced by editors in the Region, including lack of good reviewers and good quality manuscripts. He noted the shift in research being conducted at a global level, as Asia, in particular China, increases its research contribution and quality. He highlighted the work of the Higher Education Commission in facilitating research in Pakistan, through its digital library, education and research network, and sponsorship of research and knowledge sharing. As a result scientific publications had increased five-fold since 2001. Pakistan's research performance was now comparable to countries like Malaysia and Thailand and it was the country with the highest percentage increase in citations in the world's best research journals. He expressed the continued support of the Higher Education Council for continuing education for editors in Pakistan.

The conference sessions were held in plenary and included more than 30 oral presentations and posters. A talk on the theme of the conference "Medical journalism: difficulties and opportunities" was given by Jane Nicholson. Invited talks were given on "Where does quality come from?" and "Bilingual publications: challenges to editors" by Karen Shashok, "Visibility of Eastern Mediterranean journals" and "ICMJE guidelines: a critical appraisal" by Ana

Marusic, “Improving international collaboration among medical editors of the Eastern Mediterranean Region” by Shaukat Ali Jawaid, “Adventures in peer review’ and “Authorship” by Pippa Smart and “Evidence-based journalology” by Farrokh Habibzadeh.

Two panel sessions were held. The first was on bridging the gap between research, publication and policy-making. This subject had been stimulated by the efforts in recent years by the Council on Health Research and Development (COHRED), the Global Forum for Health Research and the World Health Assembly to improve the basis on which decisions that affect health policy and practice are made. The second panel session was on problems, opportunities and future strategies for EMAME.

Parallel workshops were held on two afternoons. The topics were: online open access resources, led by Karen Shashok and Masood Jawaid; AMSTAR: a quality assessment tool for systematic reviews, led by Zbys Fedorowicz; journal indexing, led by Mohamed Bagher Rokni; and publication ethics, led by Fatema Jawad.

3. Conclusions

With regard to the contribution editors could make to bridging the gap between research, publication and policy-making, discussion centred on what editors could do as health communicators to contribute to and facilitate bridging of the know-do gap. Among the suggestions proposed were: more targeted distribution to ensure journals reach those who can take action; short summaries to highlight the outcome and implications of research; sensitivity to

local problems and issues on the part of editors; better communication with the local media to influence communities and policy-makers; translation and publication of research results in local languages; lobbying by editors with academic institutions to address the basis on which promotions are made, encouraging research and funding that tackle local problems and advocating for change in the research assessment criteria to ensure only quality research is conducted and submitted for publication; and closer collaboration between editors' associations, academic institutions, researchers and policy-makers to encourage relevant research and intersectoral action for health.

In the discussion around the theme of problems, opportunities and future strategies, it was generally agreed that EMAME should set itself smart objectives that are manageable and achievable with clear deliverables. Current objectives should be revisited to see if they are still valid. The incoming executive committee should set a plan of action addressing key issues and only establish committees that can feasibly achieve set goals, whether in relation to indexing issues, training, peer review, ethics or other areas, and which would report back. Among the areas highlighted for possible EMAME support and common action were handsearching of nonindexed journals for reports of randomized controlled trials, visibility of journals, lack of reviewers and indexers, author training, use of a common online platform, biostatistics training for editors, and resources.

Interaction between editors at national level, together with establishment of national associations, should be encouraged, as

should links with other associations and networks, in order to share knowledge and experience Better use should be made of the EMAME website and listserv for this purpose also. Small subregional meetings and exchanges of experience with local sponsorship should be encouraged. Young people and women should be encouraged to get involved in journals in order to build up the future generation of editors and ensure proper representation of the constituent audience.

It was acknowledged that, despite the challenges, much had been achieved through the conferences and other activities in recent years. Participants agreed that EMAME should continue to concentrate on what it has done well so far and to build on its achievements in a realistic manner. Since resources for regional level activities were likely to remain few, and since most resources are concentrated at national level, national associations working in alliance with local institutions would be likely to achieve the most.

4. Recommendations

EMAME members

1. Establish, if not yet available, national associations of medical editors, in order to:
 - promote capacity development of editors
 - advocate for research for health, and
 - strengthen links with researchers and policy-makers.
2. Establish links and alliances with local institutions in order to make effective use of available resources and capacity to:
 - raise awareness of issues relating to authorship and publishing, and

- build capacity of authors in writing, and of editors in biostatistics and research methodology.
3. Share information, knowledge and experience with editors in the region, through local meetings and exchange visits, as well as improved use of the listserv and website.
 4. Organize local meetings and training activities in collaboration with the trainers available in the countries and Region.
 5. Involve young people in the management and editorial processes of the journal in order to promote editorship and sustainable publishing.
 6. Promote gender balance on editorial boards in order to ensure optimal representation of the community served by the journal.
 7. Support bridging the know-do gap between researchers and policy-makers by including summaries, policy briefs and consolidated recommendations within the content of research articles.
 8. Ensure journal websites are maintained and up to date.
 9. Ensure journal content is submitted to WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean for indexing on a regular, uninterrupted basis.
 10. Propose any changes considered desirable in the EMAME constitution to the Executive Council.
 11. Propose venues for hosting of future conferences, EMMJ6 and EMMJ7.

EMAME Executive Council

12. Review the current objectives and constitution and propose revisions.

13. Establish subcommittees to consider issues relating to visibility of journals and peer review and provide relevant recommendations to the Executive Council.
14. Promote EMAME, its role and objectives in countries of the Region where activities and membership are currently limited.
15. Promote alliances and synergy with related networks, such as, for example, the Eastern Mediterranean Evidence-Informed Policy Network (EM-EVIPnet) and the Eastern Mediterranean Regional Academic Institutions Network (EMRAIN).
16. Promote bridging the know-do gap between researchers and policy-makers by encouraging journals to include summaries, policy briefs and consolidated recommendations within the content of research articles.

WHO

17. In collaboration with the Bahrain Cochrane Centre, conduct retrospective handsearching of journals in the Regional Office library for reports of randomized controlled trials, and explore opportunities to conduct similar handsearching of journals not currently deposited in the library but available at country level.
18. Continue to support capacity-building in the Region on medical journal publishing, including indexing.
19. Continue to support the objectives of EMAME, including future conferences, and seek alliances and means of sharing knowledge with other regional associations.

5. Report of the third EMAME General Assembly

The third EMAME General Assembly was held in Karachi, Pakistan in the conference hall on the afternoon of 4 December 2010.

The General Assembly was attended by EMAME members. Maqbool Jafary, EMAME President Elect welcomed the Assembly in the absence of the President. The e-voting process for the incoming Executive Council was explained by Farhad Handjani, EMAME Secretary-General and the results announced. Two candidates tied for one position. The General Assembly decided to vote by show of hands to determine a final winner.

President:	Maqbool Jafary (Pakistan)
Past-President:	Ahmed Jamal (Bahrain)
President-Elect:	Farhad Handjani (Islamic Republic of Iran)
Vice-Presidents:	Mohamed Bagher Rokni (Islamic Republic of Iran)
	Nazeer Khan (Pakistan)
	Nada Alward (Iraq)
Secretary-General/Treasurer:	Shaukat Ali Jawaid (Pakistan)
Vice-Presidents-at-large*:	Region 1: Mohamed Daw (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya)
	Region 2: Lamk AILamk (Oman)
	Region 3: Haitham Idriss (Palestine)
	Region 4: Fatema Jawad (Pakistan)

The Assembly agreed that the constitution should be revisited and updated and the election process clarified. Members were invited

* Region 1: Djibouti, Egypt, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Morocco, Somalia, Sudan and Tunisia
Region 2: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen
Region 3: Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, occupied Palestinian territory and Syrian Arab Republic
Region 4: Afghanistan, Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan.

to submit suggestions for revision to the Executive Council. It was also agreed that the definitions and criteria for membership should be circulated through the listserv. Listserv participants, if not members, or honorary invited members, should have clear affiliation with a journal in the Region. It was agreed that those interested in organizing the sixth EMAME conference (in 2012) should send their proposal to WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean and the EMAME Executive Council for consideration. The EMAME General Assembly expressed its gratitude to the local organizers of the conference, the Pakistan Association of Medical Editors and the host, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Pakistan.