

Summary report on the

**Fourth Regional Conference on
Medical Journals in the Eastern
Mediterranean Region**

Manama, Bahrain
5–7 November 2008



**World Health
Organization**

Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean

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Contents

1.	Introduction	1
2.	Conference and workshop sessions.....	5
3.	Conclusions	6
4.	Recommendations	7
5.	Report of the second EMAME General Assembly	7

1. Introduction

The Fourth Regional Conference on Medical Journals was held in Manama, Bahrain, from 5 to 7 November 2008. It was organized by the Journal of the Bahrain Medical Society and the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, Bahrain, and the Eastern Mediterranean Association of Medical Editors (EMAME). The conference was also supported by a number of local organizations and institutions. 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 objectives of the conference were to:

- Raise awareness of editors of regional medical journals of key issues relating to development and quality of medical journals in the Region and to develop skills in that regard;
- Review the situation of medical journals in the Region and discuss ways to take regional journals forward;
- Promote collaboration and networking among editors of regional medical journals, and the role of the Eastern Mediterranean Association of Medical Editors (EMAME) in this regard;
- Review the trends in medical journals publishing, including status of electronic publishing and open access.

The conference was preceded by pre-conference workshops on medical writing and medical statistics. The conference comprised keynote presentations, parallel sessions and parallel workshops. It was attended by around 200 participants.

The conference was opened by Dr Ahmed Jamal, President of the Bahrain Medical Society who welcomed the participants. A message was delivered from H.E. Dr Faisal Bin Yaqoub Al-Hamer, Minister of Health, Bahrain, by Dr Fawzi Amin, Assistant Undersecretary for Training and Planning. In his message Dr Hamer said that the value of the conference would be reflected in better quality of health care. The Ministry of Health and the Bahrain Medical Society share the objectives in development of health care and the Journal of the Bahrain Medical Society had an important role to play in documenting and enhancing medical research in the country. The conference represented practical implementation of Bahrain's collaborative work with WHO, adding a regional dimension to this activity to support medical research and dissemination of its results.

A message was delivered from Dr Hussein A Gezairy, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, by Ms Jane Nicholson, Editor, Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean. In his message Dr Gezairy noted that it was 30 years since the Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean—WHO's governing body in the Region—mandated the Regional Office “to take steps for the consolidation of the resources and services of the WHO regional medical library and the development of a viable network for biomedical journals” (EM/RC28A/R.9). This significant step resulted in the establishment of the Index medicus for the Eastern

Mediterranean Region, filling a major gap in international indexing and abstracting services and bringing visibility to the health and biomedical research conducted and published in the Region. Regional Office support to regional journals had been scaled up further in recent years, with subsidised subscription to many journals in the Region for libraries and institutions, links to online journals in the index through the virtual health library, training activities and support for the EMAME network.

More important by far than what had been achieved, was why. WHO's objective for 60 years had been the attainment by all peoples of the highest possible level of health. This meant that WHO was most concerned with the health of populations and thus with the decisions that affected the health of nations, individually, and collectively. It meant that WHO was concerned with ensuring that all population groups had fair and equal access to health care, and the ability to protect their health. A major part of that involved research into what prevented people from attaining the highest possible health and the generation and sharing of information. But for that information to have a positive impact on health outcome it had to reach the people who could take the decisions and the necessary action to ensure the health system responded. It was this gap—known as the know-do gap—that led the Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean to endorse a resolution on bridging the gap between health researchers and policy-makers.

The Regional Committee urged Member States “to design and develop inclusive and participatory national strategies for health research involving all the main players” (EM/RC55/R.7). The

editors of medical journals were main players, and had a crucial role to play in helping to bridge the gap between researchers and policy-makers. However, editors needed good quality research material, which meant research that addressed relevant and timely questions that were important to the community and the nation. The content of many journals reflected the narrow interests of university researchers who needed to publish to achieve promotion. This was understandable but journals could do more than simply act as conduits. Journal editors could be proactive, engaging with policy-makers to understand what was needed, and with the research community to encourage research in areas that mattered to the health of the nation, and committing to publish such research.

It also meant having a peer review system that was able to evaluate the articles submitted, meeting quality criteria such as regularity in publication, visibility through being indexed, at national, regional, and if possible international level, and attracting readership. Policy-makers, health systems decision-makers and practitioners needed to encourage journals to deliver the information they needed in a way they could make use of it, and to engage with researchers and editors not only to identify the problems and find the solutions but to promote translation of knowledge into policy and practice.

Referring to the theme of the conference: “Research and publication are cornerstones of health care development in the Eastern Mediterranean Region”, the Regional Director noted that each regional conference on medical journals held since 2003 had enjoyed the collaboration of local institutions and journals. This

had enabled expansion of the network of editors and researchers in the Region who understood and cared about the need to share knowledge. He called on participants to work with WHO to ensure that medical journals did their part to bridge the know-do gap.

2. Conference and workshop sessions

The conference sessions were held in parallel and comprised the following topics: editorship, medical research publication, peer review, publication ethics, open access, indexing, e-journalism and statistics. These included more than 50 oral presentations and one poster. Keynote speeches were made on “The craft of editing” (Tim Albert), “Reaching out to mainstream science” (Ana Marusic) and “Plagiarism and copyright” (Elise Landon Neuner).

Parallel workshops were held on two afternoons. The workshop on editorship was led by Ana Marusic and focused on publishing a journal in a small community and strategies to increase quality and visibility. The workshop on publication ethics was led by Diaa Rizk and focused on the duties and responsibilities of editors and authors. Fawzi Amin and Zbys Fedorowicz led a workshop on the Cochrane Library, familiarizing participants with the work of the Cochrane Collaboration, the principles of evidence-based medicine and the ‘hierarchy of evidence’ and how to search the library. The workshop on peer review was led by Farrokh Habibzadeh and covered the process of peer review and what editors expected of reviewers. Arash Etemadi led a workshop on statistics for medical editors to enable editors to understand statistical concepts, recognize major statistical errors, and understand and evaluate statistical

remarks made by reviewers. Mohamed Ali Daw led a workshop on electronic publishing and open access which introduced the concept of open access publishing and its principles.

3. Conclusions

Among issues of concern raised in the discussions was the large number of small journals now published within the Region, all competing for papers and facing the challenge of attracting quality papers. The amalgamation of such journals was suggested, especially when numerous journals for one specialty exist within one country. The universal pressure on academics to publish in order to fulfil the requirements for promotion within the biomedical profession and the impact of this pressure on quality and ethical practice was also raised as an issue of concern, although it was acknowledged that an alternative to the current system (and the will to tackle the issue in the higher education system) does not currently exist.

Participants emphasized the essential value of the conference as a learning experience for editors in the Region and an important forum for sharing information, exchanging ideas and networking. As with previous conferences, indexing continued to be a major topic of concern as journals seek to gain recognition and attract research papers. Publishing ethics, in particular the need to raise awareness of and be alert to plagiarism and fraud, continues to be a concern in the Region.

Editors of regional biomedical journals continue to see their role largely as reactive, serving the needs of authors. There was

limited but positive response to the call for greater engagement between editors, the research community and policy-makers, in order to contribute to shaping the national research agenda towards the needs of the population, rather than only the needs of researchers, and to help bridge the know-do gap.

It was agreed that following three previous successful conferences, the recommendations this time should focus on what individuals and groups of editors could do at local level.

4. Recommendations

1. Participants, in particular EMAME members, to develop a list of individual action points based on what they have learned in the conference to implement in regard to their journals.
2. EMAME members to plan local, national and subregional activities together for networking, information sharing and educating editors of medical journals in the Region.
3. WHO to continue to support networking and information sharing activities between editors in the Region.

5. Report of the second EMAME General Assembly

The second EMAME General Assembly was held in Bahrain in the conference hall on the afternoon of 6 November 2008. The General Assembly was attended by 45 EMAME members.

Ahmed Jamal, EMAME interim president welcomed the Assembly. The e-voting process for the incoming Executive Council was explained by Farhad Handjani, EMAME Secretary-General.

The list of new Executive Council members was announced by Ahmed Jamal and endorsed by the General Assembly.

President:	Ahmed Jamal (Bahrain)
Post-President:	Basim Yaqub (Saudi Arabia)
President-Elect:	Maqbool Jafary (Pakistan)
Vice-Presidents:	Farrokh Habibzadeh (Islamic Republic of Iran) Fatema Jawad (Pakistan) Hassan Bella (Sudan)
Secretary-General/Treasurer:	Farhad Handjani (Islamic Republic of Iran)
Vice-Presidents-at-large:	Region 1: Diaan Rizk (Egypt) Region 2: Yusef Abdulrazzaq (United Arab Emirates) Region 3: Mohammad Tarwaneh (Jordan) Region 4: Mohammad Baher Rokni (Islamic Republic of Iran)

In principle, it was agreed that EMAME Executive Council needs to be broadly represented and the incoming Executive Council will explore a proposal to limit the number of Executive Council members from one particular country while encouraging active participation from all countries.

It was agreed that for the next EMAME Executive Council elections a dual system of voting will be implemented and the results will be read out at the next General Assembly and endorsed there and then. The General Assembly requested the new EMAME Executive Council to explore the best way to implement a dual voting system defined as giving the chance to vote either before the next General Assembly meeting (if not attending) or at the General Assembly meeting (if attending). It was also agreed that voting should take place not more than 2½ years after the last General Assembly.

It was confirmed that the next EMAME conference would be held in Karachi, Pakistan in 2010 and that the logo of EMMJ4 would be used again.

It was agreed that interim meetings under the logo of EMAME can take place in any of the Member States but voting will only be done at the next official EMAME conference in Pakistan.

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 Journal of the Bahrain Medical Society, and agreed that cables of thanks be sent to the local supporters of the event.