

Promote national journals for increased visibility of your research

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Scientific publication in the world started more than 300 years ago, but the very first medical journal in Nepal was published only in 1963.¹ Very inspired after getting his first article published in Indian Heart Journal in 1957, Dr. Mrigendra Raj Pandey, as the Founder Chief-Editor, started the Journal of Nepal Medical Association (JNMA) in 1963.^{1,2} Hence, with a history of almost six decades, JNMA is the first and oldest medical journal in Nepal. Subsequently many medical and health journals came into existence.^{1,2} Currently more than 100 medical and health journals are in publication.

Journals provide a medium for scholarly discourse, information sharing, and dissemination of knowledge and practices.^{3,4} National or local journals are the publications of a country where published research and authors are mostly from the same country. Status of national or local journals represent a country's scientific progress. They also play pivotal role during postgraduate medical and allied education.⁵ For resident doctors, the

most approachable journals for publication are national journals. These journals are ready resources for self-directed learning preferred by adults.⁵ They not only provide platform for reporting of cases and studies but also teach intricacies of research ethics and methodology via journal criteria and guidelines. Post-residency and throughout professional life, national journals remain an essential aspect of scientific publication.⁵ For professional growth also, certain number of publications is a must. As a result and also due to mandatory criteria set by universities and academic institutions for promotion, Nepal has seen exponential growth in scientific publication in recent times.¹ Scientific standard, however, is not always up to par. Impact factor and journal ranking such as SCImago (SJR) can be used to assess the quality of journals.² Except a few, the quality of articles and journals are yet to achieve the international standard. Due to this and multiple other reasons, many Nepali authors prefer to be published in international journals. Authors in their fascination towards international journals, however, often forget to check about the credibility of the journal, whether it is predatory or simply another research "paper mill." In many reputed international journals and a lot many predatory journals, with some fee in the form of article processing charge (APC) one can get published easily. In the process, sometimes very good research can get published in journals lacking credibility. In addition, when research from developing countries are published in international journals of developed countries, they are not that accessible to researchers, clinicians, and health policy makers due to limited access and high cost of subscriptions.³ The national journals of Nepal on the other hand, usually follow open access model and hence are easily accessible to those who need the particular research. It helps to ensure balanced scientific representation of all regions and can have greater global impact. This way national journals can play crucial role in disseminating local research to global readers.⁶ On the downside, often the national journals do not have any APCs, this can secondarily affect the quality and credibility of journals.

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Since most of the journals are published from the teaching institutions and a few by societies and other private organisations, the national journals are more approachable and author friendly. Having a journal of quality, however is a daunting task.¹ One of the hindrances towards standardisation of national journals is lack of trained human resource in "Journalology" or "Publication Science." To some extent, Nepal Health Research Council (NHRC), Nepal Medical Association (NMA), Nepal Association of Medical Editors (NAME), and other academic institutions as well as private associations are trying to provide trainings for researchers, editors, and reviewers but it is at snail's pace. Another obstacle towards standard articles and publications is that all the process is on voluntary basis, meaning barring one or two journals, neither the editors nor the reviewers are paid for their valuable work. No financial remuneration often leads to lack of time and hence compromised quality.

In the race of academic competition, the publication misconduct is also on rise.^{1,7} It is more so in institutional, local, or national journals because of peer pressure and lack of financial remuneration. In recent years the number of national journals has increased manifold. Literature search shows that most Nepali health journals are published by academic institutions, universities, councils, and health associations,^{1,3} mainly private sector. This mushrooming of journals has both upside and downside. Quite often, it is quantity that brings quality, but the downside is that there is gross lack of skilled professionals to do the work they are assigned to do. The editorial team also consists of mostly academicians-cum-researchers than pure researchers or editors. The editors often have no knowledge of Journalology and bare minimum editorial training. Sometimes, there is a good team of editors but because of no or minimal financial benefit for the editing work, quality article publication is not achieved as the editors are forced to focus on their more financially fulfilling academic and clinical works. The authors also do not follow the ethical research practice and fabrication and falsification of data is very common in developing nations.⁷ We as editors and reviewers might not always be trained adequately to identify such various ethical misconducts. At the same time, the editorial effort though very valuable is often not appreciated by publishers and colleagues. When publishers do not take their journals honestly, editors with inadequate knowledge in turn accept poor articles from poor authors, which are then sent to less experienced peer reviewers, consequently leading to publication of poor articles, and further deteriorating

local science. Unless, we break this chain, the vicious cycle will continue.¹

Keeping those issues in mind, in developing nations throughout the world, there have been efforts to improve the scientific quality of local medical journals and their international visibility through creating websites, developing indexing systems, and listings on databases such as Medline.³ Indexing not only assures the credibility but also improves visibility of both article and journal. The national journals that are included in reputed indexing systems and international databases can be counted on hand. Among the medical or health journals, currently only five are indexed on PubMed: JNMA, Kathmandu University Medical Journal (KUMJ), Journal of Nepal Health Research Council (JNHRC), Nepalese Journal of Ophthalmology (NEPJOPH), and Journal of Institute of Medicine (JIOM - only selected citations).^{2,8} PubMed is basically website and indexing is provided by MEDLINE.

Another important database, for increasing visibility of national level journals and consequently of your publication, is the Journals Online (JOL) network. The JOL network initially began as an INASP project in April 1998. INASP (previously International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publication, now International Network for Advancing Science and Policy) started this project for upliftment of research and publication in different developing countries and regions. On Nepal Journals OnLine (NepJOL) Database of JOL network, there are about 247 journals listed alphabetically. It provides a common platform for all kinds of journals and scientific publications from Nepal. It is managed by Tribhuvan University Central Library (TUCL), Nepal since 2007 and hosted by Ubiquity Press, United Kingdom. More information can be obtained from NepJOL website at <https://www.nepjol.info/index.php/index/about>. However, all Nepali journals are not on NepJOL database. The NepJOL database has adapted Journal Publishing Practices and Standards (JPPS) framework (<https://www.journalquality.info/en/>) that provides detailed assessment criteria for the quality of publishing practices. To some extent this helps in the quality assurance of publications.

In Nepal, except for NepJOL's JPPS there does not seem to be much evaluation parameters set by any government or non-government authority regarding quality assurance or standardisation of scientific publications. In 2019, an effort was made for standardisation of national journals by NHRC in collaboration with NMA. They

established a PubMed inspired database of Nepalese biomedical journals as Nepal Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System Online (MEDLINE) and named it NepMed.² However, it is not much active. Hence, Nepal still relies on international standards of indexing and databases like PubMed, Scopus, Web of science, etc. This in a way is good, but if some filtering mechanisms were also present at local or national level authorities such as NHRC, Nepal Academy of Science and Technology (NAST), University Grants Commission (UGC) or Universities, that would have been praiseworthy and standard maintenance would have been more organised.

Regarding the importance of national journals, they play an important role in scientific relevance of the country and region. They are important to voice out the relevancy of the research at local level.^{6,9} Unless it is very unique and/or scientifically robust, the reputed international journals avoid publishing articles from a developing country like ours and hence increasing the rejection rates. However, national journals are in the position to appreciate the research more. Cumming from JOL network emphasises that national journals are more likely to publish materials relevant to research agendas and development within those countries rather than international journals.⁹ For academic excellence, the articles should be published where it is relevant.^{6,9} Cumming also states that institutional journal helps as stepping stone and allow researchers to have a voice.⁹

Sadly, due to various reasons such as lack of funding, irregular publication schedules, poor local and international visibility, weak peer-review mechanisms lacking credibility, many national and local journals are struggling to remain afloat.^{3,4} It can be attributed to lack of importance placed on journals by decision makers in government and academia, and the lack of opportunities for career development and academic progression in developing countries.³

Like developed countries, Nepali academia should also invest in trained skilled personnel, only then quality

assurance can be guaranteed. Periodic trainings and refresher courses on research and publication have to be conducted throughout the year. The very basic training that is required is at researcher, author, editor, and peer reviewer level. The national journals, academic institutions, research organisations, and other government and private organisations such as NHRC, NAST, UGC, NMA, NAME, etc. are conducting trainings for researchers, authors, editors, and reviewers on their own. These are helping all concerned to sharpen their axes and refine their knowledge and skills, but they need to be strengthened further. More awards, fellowships, grants, scholarships can be awarded to researchers, editors, and publishers to encourage scientific environment from funding agencies, related sponsors, and government. Investment in the training of skilled personnel, result in a strong growth in the number of enrollments and degrees in both Masters and PhD courses across the country.¹⁰ More PhD scholars means more robust research.

In summary, publications in national journals should be promoted because it is the local community with similar socio-economic background, ethnicity, and public health issues that has the appreciation and value for the researches done in this country. The treatment or patient management protocols that we follow may be very unique or important here but not of much value to readers from abroad. NepJOL has played an important role in providing a common platform but more is required. More funds have to be allocated for research and publication by concerned stakeholders, academic institutions, universities, and government as well. Publishers need to be extremely careful while selecting editorial board members. Peer reviewing by at least two subject experts should be mandatorily practised by all national journals. Similarly, periodic evaluation of the journal office has to be done by the publisher.¹ NepMed managed by NHRC can step up and set some quality standards or develop a "Research System" that would ensure high quality research and publication. It is high time that we promote local journals as resource for health³ and platform for recognition.⁶

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