

# Regional associations of medical journal editors: moving from rhetoric to reality

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In the era of evidence-based policy and practice, the importance of using research for decision-making in health systems has been increasingly recognized (W1). Numerous strategies to take research knowledge into action and policy (i.e. “knowledge translation”) are sought (W2). These strategies are of particular importance for developing countries, where health research can bring tangible benefits to the health status of their people.

Researchers, practitioners and policy-makers in developing countries are faced with situations very different from those encountered by practitioners in industrialized countries. The so-called 10/90 gap includes lack of access to information and lack of investment in research. The concept of evidence-based decision-making has contributed to gains, but it has also decontextualized knowledge: often we need answers to our local problems, and the existing evidence established at the global level may not be exactly what is needed to solve them. It is essential, therefore, for developing countries to conduct research on their own problems and to be able to make use of the global knowledge in the local context. This in turn necessitates the publication of their own biomedical journals.

Journals — either traditional paper ones or in electronic form — are one of the major media for dissemination of information. Editors need specific skills to acknowledge their readers’ needs, be familiar with publication practices, and exercise editorship. Many editors of biomedical journals published in developing countries, however, do not have any formal training for their craft and may do their job out of interest or simply because they have been assigned to the position. Almost all of them find their way through trial and error among the various pushes and pulls to which their information products are subjected.

To help editors in need of a forum or network for exchange of ideas, several

associations have been established. They have all provided valuable services in educating medical journal editors, but none was solely directed to the problems facing editors of small journals, which are completely different from those dealt with by editors of mainstream journals (3). While the mainstream journals primarily have problems with authorship vs contributorship, conflict of interests, or ethical issues in conducting research and publication, editors of small medical journals have more fundamental problems including lack of an infrastructure for running a journal, insufficient funding, lack of expertise in desktop publishing, low visibility, and problems with absorbing high-quality research articles. Editors in developing countries reasonably require their own specific training courses and associations responsible for catering to their different needs.

In 2003, a group of editors of biomedical journals published in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region met at a conference held in Cairo, Egypt, to assess the status of medical research and journals in the region (3). One outcome was the recognition that editors working in other countries in the region, regardless of the social, cultural, political and economic status of their countries, face similar problems — to which they once had to find solutions through trial and error. Inspired by the Forum of African Medical Editors (FAME) that was established in 2002 in response to the very similar needs of African medical journal editors (4), editors at the Cairo conference decided to establish the Eastern Mediterranean Association of Medical Editors (EMAME) (5), in order to create a forum that allows for exchanging ideas, sharing experiences and learning from one another.

The official birth of EMAME was announced in the second conference held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in October 2004 (6). According to its constitution, EMAME is a nongovernmental,

non-partisan and non-profit organization whose mission is to support and promote medical journalism in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region by fostering networking, education, discussion, and exchange and to be an authoritative resource on current and emerging issues in the communication of scientific information. Adherence to the Association would allow the editors to consider the latest editorial standards set by these associations, and to learn more about their craft, hence, to become better editors. “Better” editors mean better journals and a better flow of information that undoubtedly promotes more effective knowledge translation and better settlement of evidence-based policy and practice. Empowering of biomedical journalism in the region, where for its different climates, religious beliefs, cultural habits and level of health standards has a somewhat different disease epidemiology, can be beneficial to the promotion of health in the region and in the world at large. ■

## References

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