

The importance of scientific publication in the development of public health

It is an honor and great pleasure to contribute this guest editorial to the “Science and Public Health”, an official Journal of The Brazilian Association of Graduates in Collective Health (Abrasco). The topic *The Importance of Scientific Publication in the development of Public Health* is I believe essential, as it reflects the fundamental principles in the values and goals of the World Federation of Public Health Associations (WFPHA): Advance Public Health practice, education, training and research.

As it is observed from centuries of experiences, the impact of Public Health is not limited by borders and sharing of evidences through scientific publication will help a lot in minimizing the borders and contributing to the use of evidences for bringing changes in global health.

Writing is the most important means for communicating scientific work. Research and publication complement teaching and training, clinical care, and public health works. There are many reasons for writing. The most compelling reason for many professionals to start writing is to fulfil specific job requirements by employers that include promotion to an academic position, professional accreditation in the form of continuing medical education (CME), and improving prospect of success in research grant application. Publications can also be regarded as an asset that enables authors to gain recognition and acknowledgement as experts in a particular field at national and international levels. Publication in peer-reviewed journals also gives international recognition for an individual, department, university, and institutions. In some cases where a topic of major global importance is included in a publication, the author’s country, and even the region, may also get a greater recognition.

Implementing research and publishing results is crucial for a career in sciences. Doing research is only half of the picture. If the results of research studies or program documentations are not published- and where they are published has an important impact also- other researchers cannot appreciate the value of the evidence generated, they cannot see the evidence or further build on it, and overall science cannot develop and grow.

Among researchers, the adage “Publish or Perish” (i.e., publish your research or losing your career) is a threatening reminder of the importance of publication. Despite the skepticism, the phrase makes an important point in public health: publishing evidences and availing to the wider user is very critical for the progress of science and in bringing changes based on evidence.

Over the past few decades a lot has changed in the knowledge and practice of public health. Simultaneous to these changes, the rapid expansion of technology is being used to swiftly transfer published information. The technology has afforded practitioners, managers, researchers, policy makers and other beneficiaries the means to access, search, and share information increasingly with greater ease and speed. The technology has also helped in easing the process of submission, review and time for the publication of scientific papers.

The greatest part of a writer’s time is spent in reading, in order to write: a man will turn over half a library, a quote by the 18th century British writer Samuel Johnson, clearly speaks the discipline imposed by scientific publication increases the depth of knowledge for the author and results in a greater contribution of knowledge for others.

Scientific publication is an important component of public health practice. Young public health professionals including those from the developing world with limited access to peer-reviewed journals should be encouraged to start writing early and senior professionals, public health associations and institution, and editors of journals should act as role models and provide a continuous support.

Mengistu Asnake

President, World Federation of Public Health Associations