

New Avenues for Academic Publishing: Lessons learnt from Journal of Orthopaedic Case Reports



Journal of Orthopaedic Case reports was started in 2011 and is in its fourth year of publication. The journal was started due to certain issues that we were facing at that time with regards to publication of case reports. Most Journals had stopped accepting case reports (as they affect the impact factor negatively) and other accepted it in very limited numbers [1]. There was no other avenue at the time to publish case reports and we at Orthopaedic Research Group realised that a lot of good clinical material was not getting published due to these reasons. We decided to start a platform for publication of these case reports in form of Journal of Orthopaedic Case Reports. At that time we had no experience in academic publishing and had no contacts within the publishing world. It was a strange world to venture into specially for surgeons.

Academic Publishing has grown over the years to become a huge industry. When we first started contacting external publishers for JOCR, we were given loads of paper documents (contracts) and huge financial statements. Also one of our conditions was to keep the Journal open access and available to all for free. All publishers had different policy for open access journals and the finances demanded for open access journal was much more than a subscription journal. Even for a subscription journal, it was the publisher who decided the subscription price and other financial details. We later learnt that this is very strictly held by the publishers and in past entire editorial boards of Journals have resigned due there disagreement on journal pricing!! [2] Of course the publishers do provide the infrastructure and help with promoting the journal, however the cost and other terms and conditions made it difficult to start JOCR with an established publisher. At this point we took a decision that we will publish JOCR on our own with the orthopaedic research group as the publisher. We studied the entire process and our experience in making the IORG Website and other electronic portals came in handy. We started our website and manuscript portal 'Scripture' with minimal capital. Most of the work done for JOCR was one in-house at IORG. For the first two issues the Editor doubled as the Journal co-ordinators, copyeditors, manuscript designers and multiple other jobs where the need arose (with staff strength of 2 this was inevitable). However this helped us learn the complete process of running the journal from smallest details of website design to the final print and distribution. And to our amazement we were able to do this with minimum funding and were able to keep journal Open Access and also distribute 5000 print copies of the journal for free to members of Indian Orthopaedic Research Group [3]. There were hurdles and many a times there were delays and errors too. However we have worked towards improving JOCR in these years and I believe we have been able to raise the standard of the journal significantly. Thus self-publishing allowed us to learn the process, keep the cost of the journal in check (within resources) and helped us keep the journal free for all. We also got JOCR indexed with most prominent indexing bodies and have already submitted our application to Pubmed.

Over a period of time we also realised that we had immense freedom and flexibility related to format of articles and contents that are published in JOCR. With self-publishing we could introduce new formats like 'Case Study' 'Case Image' etc. Also we could alter the design of the articles with inclusion of 'Clinical Message', 'What to learn' sections in individual articles. From this issue onwards we have introduced a new concept of publishing reviewer's photographs with each published articles. We were already publishing reviewers acknowledge with each issue, but I believe this is one of the better ways of acknowledging the reviewers. During the review process the peer review is double blinded and neither the authors nor the reviewers know the identities of each other. However once the article is accepted for publication, we believe both the authors and reviewers should know identity of each other. This will help in forging better academic bonds between them. Some may raise an objection saying that this may lead to reviewers being biased towards accepting the studies. However since we are already publishing acknowledge of all the reviewers during that time period irrespective of acceptance or rejection of the article, this issue will not cause significant bias. In all I believe the benefits of acknowledging reviewers with each article is much more than any potential negative effect. Also from this issue we have increased the number of articles from maximum 10 per issue to 20 per issue. This is due to rapidly increasing number of articles that are been submitted to JOCR. We are even possibly thinking of increasing the number of issue to 6 per year.

However this learning process does not stop with JOCR. This experience with Self-Publishing has made us more confident in tackling one of the major moral issue that the academic publications are facing today. The issue of 'Withholding' research behind bars of subscription [4]. Any of the reader who is into research and writing papers, immediately recognises this agony of watching the 'payment page' for an excellent journal article. Journals were meant to disseminate information, so that patients across the globe can be benefited. Currently the inhibitory cost of journal subscription has almost defeated the purpose. There has been a symbiosis of major publishing companies to acquire journals with higher impact factors and thus leaving researchers with no

choice. In this scenario, both publishing and reading journals has caused significant financial burden both on university libraries and on individual surgeons and is one of the major hurdle to dissemination of knowledge. We have now decided to do something to change this scenario by starting the Academic Publishing House of the Orthopaedic Research Group named 'A-Pub'. We are proud to announce that we have started working with academicians and clinicians across the world to contribute in this initiative. Journals and online portals for free knowledge dissemination are under construction and will be started in this year. We already have a List of Journals which are finalised and under development namely 'Asian Journal of Arthroplasty & Arthroscopy (AAA)', 'International Journal of Spine (IJS)', 'Journal of Medical Thesis (JMT)', 'Journal of Orthopaedic Complications (JOC)', 'International Journal of Paediatric Orthopaedics(iJPO)', 'Journal of Orthopaedic Conference Proceedings (JOCP)', 'Trauma International (TI)', 'Journal of Orthopaedics and Rehabilitation (JOR)' and 'Journal of Hand and Microvascular Surgery (HMV)'. Few other Journals like Journal of Bone and Soft Tissue Tumors (JBST) and Basic Science Journal is under consideration. All these Journals will be based on principle of 'Academic Philanthropy' and will be fully open access. High standards of peer review and equal balance of Evidence and Experience based Literature will be maintained in all of these Journals. The articles will be online and easily accessible and hence more citations from the same will enhance the academic repute of the authors and their institutions. Of course we understand that this is a huge undertaking and there will be difficulties and obstacles. However we believe we have good guidance from our seniors and healthy support from our colleagues. Lessons learnt from Journal of Orthopaedic Case Reports will help us immensely and I think we will be able to do justice to this huge task and help realise our goal of 'Enriching Orthopaedics'. Through this Editorial I would like to extend an invitation to our readers to join us in this endeavour. If you are interested in contributing towards any particular project or projects please contact me directly by email. With this I leave you to enjoy the latest (and the largest) issue of JOCR.

Warm Regards

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