

EDITORS OF MEDICAL JOURNALS IN PAKISTAN—ARE THEY NAVIGATING A STORM?

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This article may be cited as: Ahmed F. Editors Of Medical Journals In Pakistan—Are They Navigating A Storm?. J Med Sci 2025 October - December;33(4):177-178

The field of medical journalism in Pakistan is undergoing significant changes and facing unique challenges. Despite an increase in the number of journals recognized by the Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PMDC) and the Higher Education Commission (HEC), meeting international quality standards remains difficult. Editors of Pakistani medical journals face a tough dilemma: they must balance the goal of sharing local research with the ethical and practical challenges posed by global indexing requirements.¹

In Pakistan, a medical editor's responsibilities extend far beyond proofreading and formatting. They act as gatekeepers in a demanding environment where "publish or perish" is more than just an adage — it's vital for faculty advancement and career development. This systemic pressure creates particular challenges, often intensified by limited resources, cultural differences, and a lack of formal training in editorial management. As the global scientific community progresses toward Open Access and increased transparency, editors in Pakistan must balance local relevance with the need to meet international standards.²

The difficulties encountered by editorial boards in Pakistan can be categorized into three key areas: ethical integrity, structural constraints, and the peer-review crisis.

THE ETHICAL / MORAL DILEMMA: PLAGIARISM AND "GIFT" AUTHORSHIP

The most common problem is a violation of publication ethics. Editors often see manuscripts with high similarity scores. While tools like Turnitin make it easier to identify these issues, the main problem is the lack of understanding of "salami slicing" (dividing one study into multiple papers) and "gift authorship." In Pakistan's academic community, there is a widespread social pressure to include senior faculty members as co-authors, regardless of their actual contributions. Editors frequently face

resistance or professional isolation when they question authorship or reject papers for ethical reasons. Additionally, the rise of predatory publishing has confused new researchers, who might unintentionally submit low-quality work to regional journals, expecting the same minimal oversight experienced elsewhere.³

STRUCTURAL DILEMMAS/CONSTRAINTS:

Structural constraints refer to the institutional, financial, and organizational barriers that prevent a medical journal from functioning as a world-class scientific platform. These are often the "invisible" hurdles that hinder even the most dedicated editorial teams. In many Western journals, an Editor-in-Chief is supported by a Managing Editor, a production team, a biostatistician, and a dedicated IT department. In Pakistan, the structure is often a "one-man show." A senior professor or faculty member usually acts as the editor, secretary, and proofreader simultaneously. This leads to rapid burnout and a high risk of "clerical errors" (such as incorrect citations or broken links) because the editor is bogged down in administrative minutiae rather than focusing on the journal's high-level scientific direction. Moreover, when the Editor-in-Chief retires or changes institutions, the journal's "office" often moves with him or her. This results in the loss of physical records, disrupted communication with indexing bodies, and a lack of institutional memory.

THE PEER-REVIEW DILEMMA:

A Decreasing Asset Peer review is crucial for scientific literature, but in Pakistan, it remains weak. Finding capable, willing, and prompt reviewers is a challenge for editors. Heavy patient loads and teaching duties burden many clinicians and researchers. As a result, "reviewer fatigue" is a real issue. Many reviewers give brief comments, missing important methodological problems. This forces editors to either act as primary reviewers—risking bias

and burnout—or face long “time-to-publication” periods, which discourage high-quality submissions. ⁴

CONCLUSION

THE PATH AHEAD

The obstacles are challenging, but they can be overcome. A structural change is needed to improve the quality of medical journals in Pakistan. The PMDC and HEC should prioritize quality and ethical standards over just statistics. Editorial roles should be acknowledged as formal academic contributions, possibly with allocated “protected time” for faculty involved in board duties.

Moreover, there is a pressing need for the “Association of Medical Editors” in Pakistan to expand its initiatives to offer standardized training for peer reviewers and editors. Ultimately, organizations need to allocate resources to professional editorial teams, shifting from the “one-person operation” model to a collaborative approach that incorporates biostatisticians and medical illustrators. The editors in Pakistan are tasked with maintaining the nation’s scientific heritage. By addressing these systemic issues through collaborative initiatives and adopting new technologies, Pakistani journals can transition from

the periphery of global medical discussions to a pivotal position.

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