

Survival of a State Journal: The Battle after Birth

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“Well begun is half done,” they say. And so, we began!

The inaugural issue of our new journal, “Journal of Vision Sciences” took its first baby steps into the big and real world of medical science publishing this April. Like an infant born in this digital age, it came with some congenitally inherent qualities – it was online, open access, peer-reviewed and niche. Yet, it retained some of the old world charm of a print edition and was even “hand” delivered to most of our members. The content wore a resemblance to the evolving science we all practice and profess, boasting of articles on “hot topics” like Smartphone Indirect Ophthalmoscopy, Laser Blended Vision-LASIK for Presbyopia and Initial Clinical Experience in 100 Indian Patients and Imaging the Intraoperative Macular Morphology Changes using a Handheld Spectral Domain Optical Coherence Tomography, matching the likes of those currently published in its senior international counterparts.

Yet, after all was said and done, this was only, as the adage went, “half done.”

No sooner had the celebration died down, the glitter worn out than we realized that giving birth was probably the “easier” part. Now ensuring survival suddenly became the bigger problem!

The initial enthusiasm with which we were approached with submissions dwindled, nay, almost disappeared. Personal attempts of sourcing articles

from the academic community within the society were met with tepid responses. Weeks chugged along, and the deadline to release the second edition was looming dangerously close and still there were no signs of the much-desired traction. Soon, we met with the realization that keeping this journal alive would require special efforts. What was even more significant was the fact that this arduous effort would become ongoing and relentless.

Hence, what went wrong? In this editorial, we attempt to thrash out some of the issues that plague the minds of our potential contributors that may have discouraged them from submitting their work.

The most common repartee is that JVS is not an “indexed” journal. Let us examine this concern more closely. Being “indexed” on PubMed is not an impossible task but also not the most important milestone either. It takes a calculated period of time in any journal’s existence wherein a specified number of original articles and citations are needed before application to PubMed is entertained. This leads to a “catch 22” situation. We cannot get indexed without articles, and we do not get articles because we are not indexed! In this regard, it is worthy of mention, that “indexing” on other platforms such as PubMed Central (PMC), Scopus, EMBASE, Medline, Index Medicus, Index Copernicus, and several more are on our immediate horizon. These are important indices too. For example, while calculating an author’s “H-index” Google Scholar uses all these indices in its computation, emphasizing the importance of “indexing” beyond PubMed. JVS is already present in Google Scholar. Similarly, ResearchGate uses an RG score and impact points. We all publish to get read! These databases serve that purpose. What is of pertinent importance is that when we do get on PubMed, previously published articles get retroactively indexed. Hence, it is a matter of time, and we must persist.^[1-3]

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In this regard, it is important to understand the quality of work submitted and published also influence the speed of getting indexed. The Asia-Pacific Journal of Ophthalmology led by the charismatic Dennis Lam has shown how in a very short period of time; the journal obtained PubMed indexing. Undoubtedly, the rich experience of the editorial board attracted choice articles, which enhanced the quality of science published from the very beginning. Closer home, the Journal of Clinical Ophthalmology and Research has shown that with experienced leadership, a robust online publishing platform, the persistent and timely release of the issues and wide and free distribution, getting indexed is an achievable dream.^[4,5] Yet, duration and quality of the editorial board is not the only criteria. Retina Cases and Brief Reports, from the same publishing house and editorial board as the prestigious “Retina” took several years before getting indexed. Other state journals from the country have led by example and attracted a very high standard of content. The Delhi Journal of Ophthalmology and the Kerala Journal of Ophthalmology need special mention in this regard.

Another concern of our readers has been that they “lack clinical content” or the “expertise to convert their clinical experience into the written word.” This they cite as the reason for not publishing. It is important to mention that every submission does not have to be an original article or a review. There are other more achievable formats, which include case reports, photo essays, new instruments, techniques in surgery and many more. All these formats are acceptable in JVS. Besides, as a new journal, we retain the right to evolve into any form we desire, a distinct advantage from more established journals that

have to comply with their fixed formats. Depending on the requirement we could consider special issues that address subspecialties garnering a more focused call for articles and targeting focus groups. Yet, this may corrode the more generic nature of the journal, which is currently its forte.

We need to move beyond the comfort of our clinical practices and instill a self-disciplined approach that involves the effort to observe, record, document, format, and submit to this journal. Only scientific contributions can keep a scientific journal alive, and this cannot happen without our collective participation. Our readers must realize that there is only one way to help our new fledging, not to just survive, but also to flourish and soar to great heights and that is – active contribution.

So, keep writing! And yes, keep submitting!

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