

# RESEARCH IN THE DISCIPLINE OF GENERAL SURGERY: EVIDENCE BASED DATA

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Research can be defined as the “search for knowledge or any systematic investigation to establish facts”<sup>1</sup>. Research therefore increases our understanding of the phenomenon under study. Researcher thus contributes to the understanding of the phenomenon and communicates this understanding to others and medical journals are the portals through which their work gets promoted. There are various categories of study designs to conduct a research. In a hierarchy of study designs the case reports / case series type of descriptive studies are placed at a lower level in comparison with meta-analysis and systemic reviews.<sup>2</sup>

The quality of a medical journals is rated according to various criteria. This includes the indexing body, impact factor, citation index, H index (H Index - based on the set of the scientist's most cited papers and the number of citations that they have received in other people's publications) etc.<sup>3</sup> Thus medical journals seek and entertain high quality research.

In recent years the editors of various journals have noticed an increase in-put from various contributors to scientific literature from Pakistan. This is a healthy change and is appreciated but having said that a significant observation was poor quality of research. Such articles are not considered of high quality to be compared with other regional countries.<sup>2,4</sup> In order to bring evidence based data to limelight, a search was made to find out number, type and quality of original articles published during year 2009 in Pakistani “regularly” published medical journals. From quality of articles we intended to deduce the attitude of authors towards research. The purpose was to identify areas of improvement in the background of knowledge thus gained.

The search included data bases like Pakmedinet, Pubmed and websites of various journals. The journals searched were JPMA, JCPSP, PJMS, JSP, PAFMJ, PJMR, PMJ,

RMJ, JLUMHS, JDUHS and AKEMU. The results are given in table 1.

**Table 1: Journals and Original Articles Published**

Journal	Published Issues (n)	General Surgery Articles (n)	Total Articles published (n)
JPMA	12	06	154
JCPSP	12	13	120
PJMS	6	10	171
JSP	4	16	35
JLUMHS	3	07	53
JDUHS	3	04	15
PJMR	4	01	21
RMJ	2	05	58
Pak Armed Forces J	4	08	80
AKEMU	4	03	48
Professional Med J	4	23	116
Index Medicus	-	06	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>871</b>

Almost all studies published were descriptive in design. There was no gap in knowledge upon which they were based. Most fell into category of redundant publication. University journals were irregular in publication. Studies do not depict University level research. Most of the articles in university journals were from the same university and this resulted in conflict of interest. Another observation was that journals published from northern part of country contained articles from that region and those from south had contribution from the same region. This geographical divide is quite strange. Editor’s association with particular institute also influenced the publication of an article.

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Attitude assessment was made by reading articles. This showed that from the same university articles on same subject were reported from various units in different journals. This practice makes no sense. It reflects that IRBs in the universities either do not exist or are non functional as they could not monitor as to what is being researched. It also reflects that purpose of research may be something different. Gift authorship was another issue. The contributors from various disciplines were given authorship though subject never related to their own field. Truly speaking there was hardly any research in relation to discipline of general surgery. With large number of medical universities both in public and private sectors with large number of faculty members no paradigm shift was apparent.

It therefore appears that research per se is still not visible in its true sense. One suggestion in this regard is to make a division in teaching hospitals and medical universities by giving choice to the faculty member to become a consultant or opt for research position. Making distinction between a clinician and a researcher may bring some positive change in the attitudes of an individual. They should be told up front that if they consider themselves a scientist then scientific impact of the scientist must be apparent in terms of quality research.

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