

JMT Guest Editorial : Punita V. Solanki



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Are medical thesis published or these remain the entity of grey literature?

While penning down my thoughts for the "Journal of Medical Thesis (JMT)", I am reminded of the "six honest serving men" of Rudyard Kipling.¹ These men go by the names: What, Why, When, How, Where, and Who. Let's advantageously rely on these honest men to highlight the importance of the Journal of Medical Thesis, which has the potential to become a sought after journal in the near future amongst budding researchers.

What to publish in Journal of Medical Thesis?

The Journal of Medical Thesis will be the right place to publish every naïve researcher's first attempt to research in the form of a thesis i.e. their proposition submitted for a post graduate or a doctoral degree in universities. It is an attempt to shift the presence of theses from grey literature to the published world.

Why publish medical thesis?

Publications have become mandatory while applying for medical teaching jobs in medical institutes, for job promotions in medical institutes, for obtaining a PhD degree, for better job prospects as well as for annual increments in private medical institutes. These steps aim to encourage publications amongst the medical fraternity and stay upfront in their fields of clinical practice.

A high frequency of plagiarism is often found in theses and so these do not meet the publication objectives. The onus will lie on the medical schools/institutes to initiate an active role and responsibility, to take the necessary actions to detect and avoid plagiarism among their students. This will ensure ethical and scientific conduct of research; produce quality theses, thereby finding their presence in publications. Also writing theses based on these grounds, will be the first step towards learning not to plagiarize.^{2, 3, 4}

Science is a quest for the truth. Every study, whether done as a thesis or not, is a step towards finding out the truth about an issue or a problem. So it should be published. It will help in sharing experiences, building knowledge and would be a starting point for a new research question for fellow investigators.

When to plan for publication of a medical thesis?

It is advisable to plan publication of a medical thesis, from day one of writing a research protocol in a medical institute and from the start of a research thesis/dissertation. A planned decision should be made in collaboration with the research guide, teaching faculties, ethics committees and university guidelines. This will enable researchers to conduct a research which stands true to the tests of publication review process and that which meets publication objectives. An appropriate study design should be selected keeping in mind the time constraints for the conduct of a thesis/dissertation study. Such theses will be valued, will meet the publication objectives, and will be a positive first experience and a sound beginning in the research career of a student.

How to plan for publication of a medical thesis?

Nowadays there are journal articles, guidelines on Equator Network, textbooks and online help available to guide graduate, postgraduate and doctoral students, from conception i.e. start of research to the finish i.e. preparing a manuscript for publication. A healthy piece of advice is, to start well on time and never hesitate to get the research work reviewed by the experts or mentors in the related field of research.⁵ Universities/Institutes may consider manuscript writing along with thesis writing, as part of the submission criteria for postgraduate examination requirements. This will encourage more number of publications of medical thesis; thereby shifting their presence from grey literature to published literature.

Where are medical theses found?

In India there is a database maintained by National Medical Library of Directorate General of Health Services under Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, for the medical thesis/dissertation submitted to different medical colleges in India [6]. However this 'database' only contains title of the thesis and name of student and guide and does not contain any other details. Moreover this database is highly incomplete and in my view catalogues very limited number of thesis and is poorly maintained. Many Universities globally maintain databases of Medical Thesis, which although considered as grey literature, are however made available online as a reference study for prospective students enrolled/admitted under the same University. Dissertation Copies are also maintained by institutional libraries and the concerned departments for referrals for future students.

Despite having such databases at national libraries, universities, institutions and departments, these are not easily accessible to everyone amongst the research community and cannot be cited in papers submitted for publications. Quite often this grey literature can be very helpful in guiding the first few steps of a researcher in his or her research career. Journal of Medical Thesis can be very useful resource for every budding researcher. JMT can be viewed as an encouragement for the budding researcher, right from his/her first attempt to research. It will help the researcher in building his/her foundation of research practice, in an ethical and a scientific manner. This will ensure publication of quality papers from the first step on. It is rightly said "Perfect Practice Makes Man Perfect" and Not "Practice Makes Man Perfect". If you do research on unethical and unscientific grounds, you build your research career on an unstable foundation; which may come to a premature end. But if you wish to enjoy a long lasting research career, your foundations need to be built perfect, with a sound thesis or dissertation study.

Who should publish medical thesis?

Every student whose research study is approved by institutional and university ethics committees should publish his/her medical thesis, irrespective of the outcomes of the study i.e. whether the outcome is positive or negative on final analysis. Even the knowledge of a negative outcome is very useful as it will avoid wastage of time, resources, money and efforts spent on repeating the research. It will help a future researcher in avoiding pitfalls and thus explore new paths which may lead to useful outcomes.

Message here for the students who write medical thesis is - If you rely on the six honest serving men from beginning to end, they will reward you with the best outcome of a research effort. Finally do not forget that - "As you sow so shall you reap"

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