

Annals of Community Health

Volume 1, Issue 1, December 2013

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Genesis: A trip down memory lane

Annals of Community Health (pISSN: 2347-5455, eISSN: 2347-5714) is now a peer reviewed, indexed print journal with an online presence focusing on the speciality of Community Medicine and its allied subjects.

Being able to write the above sentence spreads a feeling of warmth. Well, let us go on

"Another journal? You've got to be kidding me, everybody is starting one now a days!" was a popular response when word of Annals of Community Health was spread. I can assure you that you will realise differently when you read this "brief history" of the journal. This is not like most recent "publication portals" you have encountered. This informally written, in detail recollection, addressing you, the reader will take you for a trip down my memory lane. I personally feel that it is time to connect with you, the reader, than to be politically correct. The world as we know is changing my friends, and I realise that patience to read jargon, especially of history has waned. This is a time when a book is picked to read because of a good cover and judgement is given reading abstracts, a time when everything you do sticks, gets quantified and comes back to haunt you, a time when privacy is no longer respected. The electronic revolution has changed things permanently although only time can tell its outcome. Well, enough of my musings; let me take you through the path that lead to this book being held in your hands today.

I wish to start this recollection from the very beginning; when a postgraduate joins Community Medicine / Public Health, one advises him to keep in touch with recent updates, to develop contacts.

On my interactions with postgraduates from various institutions, I noticed that Community Medicine is "taught" (for lack of a better word) differently in different colleges. I also noticed a regional flair with different colleges stressing on different aspects of the subject.

On interactions with my colleagues, I felt the need to have a common platform to share recent updates / discuss doubts and post upcoming events. To achieve this objective, along with *Dr. Praveen Kulkarni* (currently Assistant Professor, J.S.S Medical College, Mysore), I started a Facebook group "Community Health Professionals" more than two years ago. It has inspired many related groups, has 500+ members, has grown to have a pan India existence, and is now a reliable place to find updates / clear doubts / information about events.

However, we noticed that most people are happy to receive information than share it. I realised how naive I had been to assume that most are like my group of friends happy to share. I realised that very few do things not explicitly profitable to them. In spite of having 500+ active members, the group only has around 10% people actively contributing and the others just receiving it.

That is when an idea of a publication surfaced; to compile information and disseminate it, but it seemed too cumbersome and not feasible. The idea then evolved into a serial publication and for lack of a better alternative, we considered a "Journal."

When I approached *Dr. Umesh Ramadurg* with this idea, I considered myself lucky that he was of the same opinion as me. We set out researching on the what and how of a journal, thus the idea blossomed into a possibility.

In our research, we came across an article in CMAJ that beautifully describes a recent trend in journals as becoming author centric and that the editors are forgetting that a journal has to focus on interests of the reader and not on the authors. We also noticed that in spite of exponential increase in journals and mostly all the journals publishing only research articles, (some even more than 50 a month), the interest among readers has actually gone down. Ironically, they do not look at these portals of publication until they want to publish something. A question "why are journals being so successful in getting articles without readership?" crossed my mind, which I quickly dismissed, as I am not that naive not to understand the current publish or perish situation.

We then had a look at few journals people respect, and at least turn the table of contents to see if they find interesting / relevant information. On analysing "The Lancet", "CMAJ", and "IJCM", we noticed that the first two publish different sections which the editor feels important for his/her audience thereby connecting with them. IJCM though is currently increasing its original article publication over the years, maybe because of sheer availability, captures the attention of its subscribers by informative editorials, CME, seminars, and well selected review articles etc.

On our Google search, we found only Indian Journal of Community Health and IPHA journal run exclusively by Community Medicine and Public Health Professionals in India.

On seeing the above journals and to fulfil the objective for which this whole process started, we chalked out sections for our jour-

nal. We also decided on a few principles if we ever start a journal (more about that later). The tempting idea of removing the section of original research articles was dismissed at that time because without that we felt that traditionalists may not accept this as a journal and that when properly screened, research articles are the ones that actually "produce" recent updates. A blue print was ready and a plan of action set for a new journal.

I was lucky to later meet and get the support of *Dr. Raghuram V* and the three of us went on to address the tasks at hand like getting a publisher, feasibility, sponsorship, possible affiliation to established organisation, identifying an editorial team for further guidance and support.

Publisher: We contacted different publishers around us (kept unnamed for obvious reasons) and different proposals came up. Their "legal documents" and requirement of affiliation to an organisation became a bit hard for us to digest at that time. Nearly everybody asked us for experience in publishing, well, we would not have approached them if we had that! Right? (However, in retrospect, after reading a recent science magazine article "Who is afraid of peer review," I must say their fears and reservations were justified.) Well, with the concept now being more than just an idea, we refused to back down and I took up publishing it myself thinking, let's learn what's to be learned and face what's to be faced. Today when we present you this first issue, I want to tell you, the ride has been worth it and optimistically will be smoother from now on.

Feasibility and sponsorship: This was a concern that we surprisingly quite easily accomplished by the open access model of publishing.

(The system has been used and severely abused over the past decade). Although, initially we will not be able to promote the print journal aggressively without sponsorship, we are sure that the relevance of the journal will promote itself and increase subscriptions. (After all, as I said above, there is no point in running a journal that is not read).

Affiliation: The initial decision not to be "under" any organisation for fear of pressure on the editorial team to do things it does not want to do was later supported and upheld by the entire editorial team. In addition, we do not want to be bound by regional boundaries in this era of communication where the neighbour and a person half way around the world are at the same distance. We also do not want the journal to go back becoming a traditional "portal of publication", we are looking for something more and thus need independence in our work.

We want to assure you that by independence, the editorial team does not mean that it does not want advice from learned men, seniors, well-wishers; on the contrary we revere those more than anything. We understand that critical comments are most important to improve ourselves and to reach our desired objective.

We are open for individuals or organisations to support us by sponsoring our print journal to ensure wide circulation and make information available to all relevant institutes first in India, later to the world (we do not want your money, if interested please print copies for us for complementary circulation. The issue will carry your institute/organisation logo in the front page under the heading "supported by". However, we re-

quest you to not "bargain" for publication. For more details, please email any of the editors).

Editorial team identification: For future journals, I assure you that this is the most important step in starting one. In addition, an immensely tricky step can have disastrous consequences if gone wrong. The tricky part is whom do you approach? One person can run a journal (have a look at Beall's list on scholarlyoa.com for more harsh truths) but it can never be a good one.

A strong editorial team is of utmost importance for the success of a good journal. The size of the active team is also tricky as it should avoid "burn out" of the active members, and should not be too big to cause dilution and miscommunication. Also for a new journal, someone very senior will lend a high credibility. However, very few in that status can actually contribute time to establishing a new journal. We decided against that initially as we needed to build on many things to be taken seriously.

We sensed the need for like-minded people to be with us in this endeavour who understand our intention and who can be an asset to our journal through their various abilities. We wanted to create a team where new ideas are expressed freely without fear of being brushed off lightly and where people are comfortable enough that even contradiction by another team member would not bruise the ego, which can come only with mutual respect. I never expected snowball sampling to be this useful and effective, so early in my life.

To say that I was lucky again would be an understatement. Six interested, hardworking, qualified, like minded individuals whom we approached realised

what we are trying to achieve and consented to be part of it; part of "Annals of Community Health". I was delighted that *Dr. Animesh Jain*, my teacher of community medicine consented to be a part of this effort. Also, (in alphabetic order) Dr. Arvind Karinagannavar, Dr. Girish B, Dr. Manjunath Nekar, Dr. Ratnaprabha G. K (congrats on becoming a mother) and Dr. Wahid Khan have since then taken active part and left no stone unturned to bring this journal in front of you today. I hope this fellowship continues and blossoms into bigger things in the future.

The team thus formed represented a wonderful blend of youth and experience, of interest and commitment. With them, they got new ideas (three sections were added to the journal), increased the passion levels, guided us where we initially went wrong (ISSN among other things), became indispensable and by a week or two the team spirit was the best I have seen anywhere. Among other things, we then went on to (and are still in the process of) expand the editorial team, looking for honorary editors (seniors who actively contribute for selection of submitted articles to few sections) and advisors to the editorial team who share their indispensable wisdom from time to time to keep us focused.

Website: Many objectives are achieved by a journal website. Those having experience in getting a website designed know that it does not come cheap. One of the company approached replied with a quote of only USD 7,500 to host the journal along with providing reading tools and editorial workflow management. We had no choice but to do it ourselves.

I would take this opportunity to express my deeply felt gratitude

towards Public Knowledge Project for developing Open Journal Systems, which was perfect for us in all way. Thanks to them, we now have a article submission and tracking system, ability to run a paperless editorial process, permanent archive in lockss, a grasp on all required information of editorial process (through their manuals), reading tools for articles including export to citation managers, automatic indexing in Google Scholar by addition of proper metadata, readers' comments section, ref backs to articles, article level search, subscription systems etc.

The first announcement was sent out in the P. G. Refresher course organised by Department of Community Medicine, Rajarajeswari Medical College, Bangalore and in Facebook a week later. We were initially surprised at the lack of enthusiasm or even pleasant interest at our announcement. On enquiry, we realised the missing of a magic word, not *abracadabra*, but *"indexed."* We had not forgotten about it, but it was scheduled for later in our timeline. We still had 3 months for the issue to come out. Therefore, we worked on ISSN, and the website. The journal was listed/indexed in few agencies by first week of October (2 months to go) and application for ISSN was sent by the last week of October. We went ahead with the contributions at hand and we take this opportunity to thank contributors for submitting articles by keeping faith on us. We have opted out of providing a DOI number in the first year because it needs a registration of \$250 to get a prefix.

On receipt of ISSN, we were indexed in more agencies readily and with that going on the website, we are hearing more buzz about the journal.

As I promised earlier, some principles of this journal:

1. Money will not get you a publication in this journal.

2. Recommendation to an editor is of very little use (see peer review process in editorial policies of the website to understand why).

3. The journal issue will be published only by solicited articles if it feels none of the submissions are worthy of its readers time and no compromise will be made. (Please read Section Policy > original Research Articles in website to know more about what we consider publishable research).

4. Review process will not be compromised.

5. Articles will not leave the scope of community medicine.

6. When in dilemma if an article should be published, the question "will this be useful for post graduates of community medicine" will solve the dilemma for us.

I have a choice to sign off by telling you: "We unleash this journal to nullify the anomalies related to the research productivity from our sub - continent. Our pioneering efforts to instigate this journal have taken birth from a prolonged infelicitous experience with the existing medical journals being published in India. Most of the authors publishing from India are aware of the problems like editorial bias, delays in the review and publication timeframes." Or on the other hand by stating that "Annals of Community Health aims to publish cutting edge research and will become a world leader in publishing and will change the world as we look at it."

However, I will not. I am naive but not deluded, I am realistic. Maybe one day we will achieve the above statement(s), mostly not, but I assure you that we will become

the go to reference for post graduate students in the coming future which was always the goal starting from my first meeting with *Dr. Umesh Ramadurg.*

Today, you have in front of you, a beginning, a promise of better things to come, so do not be hasty to judge us if you find something inadequate, but please let us know our short comings; we are learning, we are new to publishing, we are ironing out the confusion among sections, we are yet to start some sections. All I ask of you is a bit of patience, some faith, and bless us to succeed not only in this effort but also in our future endeavours.

Signing off,
Yours sincerely,
Dr. Gagan S

P.S: 1.If you were patient with me to now, I wish to tell you AoCH is a journal with international circulation.
2. Looking at response to this article by you (Please post comments in website or send email) and the editorial team, I will decide if I am welcome to share more information that I have researched on this topic with you. So please post them.