

Orthodontic Journals in South Asia: The longer you look back, the greater you can leap ahead

Dr Rajesh Gyawali

The South Asian region occupies one fourth of the world population; however it is lagging behind the rest of the world in all aspects and orthodontic science is no exception. It is a unanimous desire of all South Asian orthodontic professionals to uplift the quality of orthodontic service, research and publications to make this region a hub for orthodontic research and destination for orthodontic tourism. To achieve all these, we need to pause a while, look at the past and have a self-reflection.

Besides the conferences, workshops, and symposia; publication is another efficient way where we can exchange our thoughts, disseminate the research findings and evaluate where the field of orthodontics is going on around the world. With the advancement in technology, the latest research going on worldwide can be accessed at our fingertips. Publications directly reveal the progress of science and reflect the current trend in clinical practice. Where does the orthodontics in South Asia stand in front of rest of the world? Are our researches up to the standards in term of research methodology and publication ethics?

A large number of scientific journals are published in South Asia region; which is increasing day by day. Among them, there are few journals focused in orthodontics. Besides, publications pertaining to orthodontic science are found in other dentistry and interdisciplinary journals as well. Further, we can see many articles of South Asian researchers published in international journals. Does the increasing number mean that orthodontics is progressing in this region rapidly? The quality of publication matters rather than the quantity. Do the articles published really contribute to the existing scientific knowledge? Or else, do they just stand as a printed document for the sake of academic promotions, professional prestige, strengthening the CV? This needs to be critically evaluated.

Young researchers often have a hard time in getting their articles accepted from a reputed journal. During this time, they are often lured by predatory publishers and predatory journals promising rapid publication after paying some amount. Those who are unaware of such predatory groups may accept their offer and later repent for the predatory business not getting any credit for their publications printed in those predatory journals. As the predatory groups are very active in developing countries, we need to make our orthodontists aware of these.

Looking into the South Asian region, we have few journals specially dedicated to orthodontics published by the orthodontic society of respective countries. Journal of Indian Orthodontic Society (JIOS) holds the longest history starting its publication by Indian Orthodontic Society since 1966. Similarly, Pakistan Orthodontic Journal (POJ) is published by Pakistan Association of Orthodontists since 2009, Bangladesh Journal of Orthodontic and Dentofacial Orthopedics (BJODO) by Bangladesh Orthodontic Society since 2010 and Orthodontic Journal of Nepal (OJN) by Orthodontics & Dentofacial Orthopedic Association of Nepal since 2011. APOS Trends in Orthodontics is the official publication of Asian Pacific Orthodontic Society started in 2011 with the aim of promoting education and research in Asia Pacific region. OJN, POJ and BJODO issues are published twice a year; whereas JIOS and APOS publications are seen 4 and 6 times a year respectively.

A recent study¹ critically evaluated the publications of South Asian orthodontic journals of past 6 years and concluded that most of the articles occupy the lower levels in the hierarchy of evidence. Out of 825 articles, we have only 9 controlled clinical trials and 3 systematic reviews/ meta-analysis. The "gold standard" of clinical research- clinical trials are the basis for evidence but conducting a trial is full of challenges in developing countries like ours. Problems may arise in administrative task for getting approval from institutional review board, applying for funding, obtaining valid informed consent from the participants, having skilled workforce in conducting the trial. Finally, the researcher must be aware of

all the steps of a good randomized clinical trial and a systematic review. There may be need of trainings /workshops for orthodontists regarding clinical trials/ systematic review and meta-analysis.

Further, looking into the south Asian orthodontic journals, we have articles authored by 10 at maximum.¹ A long list of authors in a simple clinical research always looks suspicious and unjustifiable in terms of significant contributions from each individual. Some journals restrict the number of authors and automatically reject the manuscript if it is exceeded unless a strong justification is made citing the complexity of the research work.² Should we also start making such restrictions? It can be a topic of serious discussion among editors of south Asian orthodontic journals.

In all the south Asian orthodontic journals, most of the authors were from the country where they were published. It is good to promote native researchers but global readership can only be increased by promoting foreign authors to contribute their research. The next question is - are our journals indexed in major indexing databases? Of the several, one and the main database which is the first choice among all medical researchers is the MEDLINE which can be accessed freely through PubMed. Cochrane reviews, considered as the highest standard in evidence based health care, recommends using PubMed and Embase at minimum for searching clinical trials. Inclusion in these databases would definitely increase the international viewers of our publications and thus chances of increased citation.

It is unwise to expect a drastic change, however, by analyzing all our strengths and weaknesses, we can definitely move ahead making South Asia a region of excellence in Orthodontic Science in the near future.

OJN

REFERENCES

1. Gyawali R, Pokharel PR, Giri J. Demography of publications in South Asian Orthodontic Journals. J Indian Orthod Soc 2017; 51:87-91.
2. Curzon M, Roberts J, Toumba J. Eur Arch Paediatr Dent 2017; 18:1.