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## Discussion Kernel

## Good practices of publishing AYUSH research: A practical checklist for authors

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## ABSTRACT

Since its inception, Journal of Ayurveda and Integrative Medicine (J-AIM) has been constantly striving to create an environment that inculcates and strengthens “Good Publication Practices (GPP)” amongst students, practitioners and researchers in AYUSH community. The J-AIM has been doing this in the form of conducting workshops on scientific writing and research methods on different platforms. This article is based on our experiences and varied discussions that we have had with students, teachers, practitioners and researchers during these interactive sessions, and is intended at addressing the gap that prevails in the domain. The need for such awareness is felt even more strongly ever since the Beall's list of predatory journals has been unpublished. This article tries to fill the void this disappearance has created. We analyze the current scenario of AYUSH publications, enumerate the common perceptions and concerns among the workers in the field, and consider the periodicals where the doctoral and postgraduate level of Ayurveda research works are being published at present. The article also presents a practical checklist that will be helpful for students and teachers to refer authentic resources and submit their work to an appropriate scholarly journal.

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## 1. Good publication practices in AYUSH research

The Journal of Ayurveda and Integrative Medicine constantly strives to create an environment that would inculcate and strengthen “Good Publication Practices (GPP)” amongst the researchers, students, practitioners and teachers in AYUSH fraternity. Our efforts are evident in the series of workshops conducted on “Scientific Writing” on various platforms such as ‘World Ayurveda Congress’, ‘Global Ayurveda Festival’, ‘Update Ayurveda’ and other similar events. Apart from this, our editorial board members are involved in conducting training sessions in various ‘Training of Trainers programs’, AYUSH-sponsored ‘Continuing Medical Education Programs’, ‘Scientific Writing Workshops’ conducted by Rashtriya Ayurveda Vidyapeeth, ICMR-sponsored ‘Grant Writing

Workshops’, and in other events connected with different conferences, and so on. These efforts of the Editorial Board emerge from the strong sense of responsibility to create awareness about GPP within the peer groups and prospective authors [1].

This article is based on our experiences and varied discussions that we have had with students and teachers during such interactive sessions, and is intended at addressing the gap that still prevails in the domain. The need for such awareness is felt even more strongly ever since the Beall's list of predatory journals has been unpublished [2]. This article tries to fill the void this disappearance has created, though it does not list ‘bad’ or ‘good’ journals. The article analyzes the current scenario of Ayurveda publications especially the journals in which the doctoral and postgraduate level of Ayurveda research works are being published at present. The article also gives a practical checklist that will be helpful to researchers, clinicians, teachers, and even to inexperienced students to plan and submit their work to an appropriate scholarly journal. These criteria are also important while selecting the journals for studying the subject content, and while citing the authentic information.

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### 1.1. What actually happens to postgraduate and doctoral level of Ayurveda dissertations/theses?

Ayurveda research database developed by Baghel MS and Girish KJ provides access to more than 20,000 theses/dissertation titles submitted at different universities by postgraduate and doctoral students of Ayurveda [3]. However, on a PubMed search, the key word 'Ayurveda' returns only 4627 results as of now. So, what is actually happening with those dissertations and theses? The answer to this question is a complex one; however, the fact that a similar search on Google Scholar yields more than 73,300 results speaks out something loud: possibly many of these works are being submitted to non-indexed journals, many of which are of dubious credentials and possibly 'predatory' in nature. In the recent years, many spurious journals that lack transparency have come into existence in the domain of complementary and alternative medicine which includes AYUSH streams as well. The major challenge this trend is posing is that, the students and their supervisors develop the habit of routinely reading these journals resulting in bad research, which contributes further to the perpetuation of this vicious cycle. We need to look at a few more aspects of this situation.

## 2. Problem areas

We can enlist the following major problem areas that are responsible for a poor level of awareness among AYUSH students and teachers regarding good publication practices.

### 2.1. Not being aware of the differences between popular literature and scholarly literature

We frequently encounter many Ayurveda academicians who include their articles published in newsletters, magazines, newspapers and other periodicals in their curricula vitae under the 'list of scholarly publications'. This occurs because they do not know the difference between scholarly literature and popular literature. Scholarly literature is mostly based on some kind of research (even if it is a review) and its intended readers are the scholars and experts in the field. It follows a specific format and always includes a reference section. The major feature of this kind of literature is that, it is peer-reviewed, meaning it has been read by some experts in the field and is published only after they approve of its quality and relevance; may be after many rounds of corrections and revisions. On the other hand, the popular literature is meant to be read by common people who are not experts in the field. This literature is written in a less-technical way and mostly gives an overview of the topic. It is mostly not based on original research and does not follow specific format such as abstract, introduction, methods, results, discussion and references. Most important character of such popular literature is that it is not peer-reviewed, but is only reviewed by the editorial board [4].

Research-based articles must be submitted only to scholarly journals and not to the periodicals that publish popular literature. This lack of awareness is the reason why many dissertations and theses in Ayurveda are often published in the form of books, and many papers derived out of these theses are published in weekly magazines and newsletters of popular nature.

### 2.2. Perception that only a few good scholarly journals willing to publish AYUSH research are available

On a PubMed search, we found that there are more than 375 journals that have published at least two articles containing the term "Ayurveda" (March 2017 data). This is a considerably good number, and therefore, an argument that there are no good journals in the field looks frail. We suggest that the students must search

PubMed for 'Ayurveda' and then sort the results based on 'journals' and then they will get to know how diverse kinds of journals belonging to the fields such as ethno-pharmacology, pharmacognosy, sociology, history of medicine, pharmacology, pharmaceutical sciences, integrative medicine, clinical medicine etc., have published Ayurveda-related work apart from the journals that publish works in Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) and AYUSH disciplines. Another way of searching for appropriate journals is to look for therapeutic area-based journals, for example, paper on psoriasis can go in dermatology, inflammation or even immunology related journals. This way multiple avenues are opened to seek ahead.

### 2.3. Perception that negative results are not publishable

Though there appears to be a general bias towards papers reporting positive results among the journal editors, publishing negative results has become easier now than ever before. This is because, there are dedicated journals that publish exclusively negative results. Publishing negative results too is important for many reasons: such publications ensure that other researchers are made aware of the failures or of flawed designs to avoid their involvement in similar studies, and thereby preventing wastage of resources [5].

### 2.4. Perception that no good research is possible without good laboratory and other research infrastructure

Most of the Ayurveda colleges suffer from lack of good laboratory and other research infrastructure [6]. Therefore, many teachers and students argue that this situation is a major constraint that prevents them from engaging in quality research work. While the fact is that good research is still possible with whatever is available, the only impetus warranted is a good idea. In situations like this, research in the areas of education, history of medicine, literature, sociology, health economics and outcome research, pharmacovigilance, prescription quality, protocol designing, and other similar fields that require minimal infrastructure needs to be planned. Such work can have a powerful impact, if planned carefully and scientifically. J-AIM itself accepts a variety of papers apart from experimental (clinical or laboratory) work. These include the manuscripts on single case report, review, discussion or debate, life profiles of senior practitioners or researchers, vignette (interaction with an expert), initiatives by academic institutions or industry, review of landmark articles, letters to editors, product review, book review, practice guidelines, conference report etc. [7].

### 2.5. Not being aware of various guidelines available for different research designs

If a research work is not well-planned, it is unlikely to be published with a good journal. In many institutions, the standard guidelines such as SPIRIT, CONSORT, STROBE, ARRIVE, CARE etc., are not taken into consideration while planning, conducting or publishing the research work. This leads to erroneous study designs and other important omissions such as having no control groups, no clinical trial registration number, no ethical clearance, no voucher specimen of the plant materials, no signed consent forms, and so on. These aspects have a very high impact on the quality of study and its results and happen to be the most criticized and weakest aspect of Ayurveda research. Therefore, it is always ideal to read the appropriate guidelines and plan the work accordingly so that it becomes publishable. Table 1 provides a list of such important online resources, which can be used by researchers, students, teachers of AYUSH institutions.

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