Letter To Editor

Unintentional Plagiarism: The Price For Ignoring Literature Search

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Sir,

In the April 2015 issue of IJPP, an article was published by Raj Kapoor et al on the relevance of the level of the heart in sphygmomanometry (1). The authors must have put in considerable effort in conceptualizing, experimenting and writing the article which addresses a misconception that is rampant among physicians but while they toiled on the manuscript, little did they know that it was merely a reiteration of a fact that was published twenty years ago in the “Journal of Indian Medical Association”. The title of the article was “The level of the heart: its relevance in sphygmomanometry” and I was its author (2).

Did the authors check if there were articles published earlier that delved on the same topic as the one they were about to write on? Obviously not, for had they searched the PubMed with any two of the key words ‘sphygmomanometry’ ‘level’ and ‘heart’ under (TITLE), it would have fetched them my above-noted article. The redundancy of placing the sphygmomanometer at the level of the heart is also evident in a photograph in the British Medical Journal which clearly shows the mercury manometer placed well above the heart-level of the patient (3). The reason of the redundancy is explained elsewhere (4). Can the editors of the journal or the reviewers be held responsible for this? Not quite, since the onus of doing a thorough literature survey lies squarely on the authors so as to ensure that the work they report isn’t previously published.

It may not be out of place to recall here the termination of the publication of Journal of Indian Medical Association in 2014, which is lamentable. One of the oldest medical periodicals of the country, it has been printing from Kolkata since 1934. Without indexing, which ceased around the mid-nineties, all subsequently-published articles are as good as lost forever. Many of the ideas might well re-born and published anew. It is therefore imperative that all that has been published in it in the span of 80 years be digitized and indexed, especially the journal which have ceased to exist. Govt. Bodies such as DST, UGC may take a note of it and make attempt to preserve it. The APPI should seriously consider such an initiative.

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References