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Focus of The New Journal Health Professions Education

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Editorial

Focus of The New Journal Health Professions Education

Why is there a need for a new journal in the field of health professions education?

The simple answer is that the field is expanding. The number of academics and educators interested in understanding what works in health professions education and why, increases. Existing journals turn down up to 90% of submissions and offer little opportunity for young researchers and educators to master the craft of scientific publishing in close interaction with experienced reviewers. Health Professions Education will therefore offer more extended editorial support to young researchers than is possible for existing journals. We encourage beginning authors to start submitting their work to our journal.

Second, the field focuses more and more on the *science* of health professions education and this seems to be happening at the expense of interest in the *practice* of health professions education. We will offer space in our columns for those who have interesting new practices to share with their colleagues elsewhere. Papers could have the form of a case study, a description of a new approach to teaching or assessment, report of initial data of an ongoing innovation, etcetera. Publication of such experiences will follow if your ideas have the potential to be applied by other educators in their respective schools.

Third, the scientific publishing endeavor itself needs a fresh approach. In recent years, scientists have been caught meddling with their data, making up findings,¹ or selecting their subjects such that statistically significant effects are produced.² Famous experiments turn out to be nonreplicable by other researchers.³ Truth, it seems, has become less important than having your paper published. Scientific journals add to this regrettable state of affairs by

their focus on new and spectacular findings. In addition, their policy of only publishing statistically significant results, leads to *publication bias*: since negative findings with regard to a particular hypothesis are almost never published, such hypothesis seems to have more scientific support than it in reality has.⁴ In particular the medical and social sciences fall victim of these kinds of problems because of the flexibility researchers have in data collection, analysis, and reporting, which dramatically increase actual false-positive publication rates.⁵

In the literature a number of remedies against these problematic practices are proposed. First, journals should require independent replication of findings before publishing a study. Second, the publication of non-significant findings, that is: studies that although an interesting hypothesis was tested, did not find a statistically significant effect, should be encouraged. Third, researchers should be stimulated to employ existing and validated instruments in their studies. And fourth, full disclosure of methods and publication of data collected should be required.

Here is where this new journal comes in. Of course we will provide ample room for the publication of new and exciting findings: experiments, correlational studies, case studies, and reviews that help our field of health professions education progress. But in addition, we wish to contribute to the solution of these ailments of science recently uncovered. We therefore invite researchers to submit papers that contain (a) replications of landmark studies in the field, (b) non-significant findings of interesting hypotheses, and (c) papers reporting the development and evaluation of new measuring instruments for use in health professions education. In addition, we will provide opportunities for further discussion of a particular paper by publishing the reviewers' reports

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in conjunction with the paper itself and by inviting readers to join the discussion. Finally, we will invite the authors to publish their full data.

The publication of replications

Much of the follow-up work in health professions education is built upon a finite number of landmark studies, studies that have shown certain non-obvious effects important to the training of health professionals. Let us give you a few examples: (a) clinical reasoning is assumed to be case-specific, that is: performance on a particular (set of) clinical cases does not predict performance on other cases, (b) global ratings of student performance tend to be more accurate than specific ratings, (c) multiple-choice questions and open-ended questions essentially measure the same underlying knowledge, (d) students are not able to evaluate themselves accurately, (e) problem-based learning fosters long-term retention of knowledge. These are important ideas, but how stable are they?

We call upon, in particular, young researchers in the field: Master's students and Ph.Ds to consider seriously the idea of replicating some of such findings as part of their degree work. If such replications are done well, we promise that we will publish them for you. And to supervisors we would suggest: we have seen many master students wrestle with attempts to come up with something new and original and we have seen many of them fail. Would replication not be an excellent alternative way of becoming familiar with the questions and methods that define the field?

The publication of non-significant findings

Negative outcomes of research usually have two sources: there is no effect of the treatment studied. Or the study was conducted so poorly that potential positive effects are masked by sloppy research practices. It may be clear that we are interested in publishing papers of the first category while avoiding to publish papers of the second category. Therefore, we encourage you to submit papers that report non-significant findings only if (a) the hypothesis studied is sufficiently interesting and embedded in existing literature, (b) the samples studied are carefully described, (c) the instruments used are either existing or have good reliability and validity, and (d) the statistical analyses are appropriate to the questions at hand. We are of course particularly interested in non-significant findings that help us evaluate the status of well-established theories or hypotheses in our field.

The publication of results of test development and evaluation

There was a time when educationalists spent a considerable amount of time and energy in the development, calibration, and validation of tests and other instruments useful for assessing students or conducting research. We observe that since journals do not any longer publish such reports, instrument design tends to be conducted sloppy and in an ad hoc fashion. We believe that the fact that every researcher develops his or her own instruments is one of the reasons why insufficient scientific progress is made in our field. Unlike the physical sciences there is no continuity and resourceful evolution in instrument design.

We will enable researchers to take the art of instrument design seriously once again. If you submit a short report describing characteristics of an instrument, test, rating scale that can be of wider use, we will publish it because we strongly believe that, like in the physical sciences, progress can only be made if there are well-established protocols on how to measure particular constructs and researchers use each others' well-calibrated instruments.

Finally, since Health Professions Education will be the official journal of the Association of Medical Education of the Eastern-Mediterranean Region (AMEEMR: <http://www.wfme.org/about/member-associations/ameemr>) in affiliation with the World Federation of Medical Education (WFME) and the Eastern-Mediterranean Regional Office of the World Health Organization (EMRO). It will pay extra attention to submissions from this part of the world and will hopefully play an emancipatory role for researchers from emerging universities in this region. The publication of the journal is sponsored by a generous grant of King Saud bin Abdulaziz University for Health Sciences, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. This implies that prospective authors do not have to pay a fee once their paper is accepted for publication.

In conclusion, in this first issue you will already find articles that embody our editorial policy. We invite you to submit your work to our journal.

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