

Why write?

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“The medical man is the only person who has anything new to say and who does not know how to say it”

Sir James M. Barie,

Scottish author & dramatist (1860-1937),
Creator of Peter Pan

INTRODUCTION

Publications abound on why the medical community needs to publish.^{1, 2} The motivations are myriad and vary amongst and within authors over time. The number of scientific publications increases inexorably with more and more contributions from medical professionals be it from newly qualified doctors just embarking on medical writing, or seasoned doctors hoping to add more publications to his or her ever bulging *curriculum vitae* (CV). The reasons for scientific writing and publications are many and well reported (Figure 1). In this editorial, the reasons for publication in general are mentioned and the benefits for publication for the medical profession working in Brunei Darussalam are explored. However, there may be many other reasons that may not have been covered.

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ALTRUISM

The most commonly quoted reason for scientific publication is ‘altruism’, the desire to advance knowledge and benefit mankind by sharing one’s findings, experience and thoughts with the scientific community. The main purpose of scientific publishing is therefore to disseminate knowledge, coupled with a certain degree of moral obligation to publish any significant novel observation or findings, in the hope that the disseminated knowledge will affect clinical practice, inform patients and / or influence future research.

For those with academic appointments research output and quality in terms of publications are measured. These measures determine the amount of funding given by grant-awarding bodies who closely examine the publication records of the investigators. The academician’s productivity therefore determines the financial well-being of his or her institution. Writing and getting published would then improve one’s prospect of being

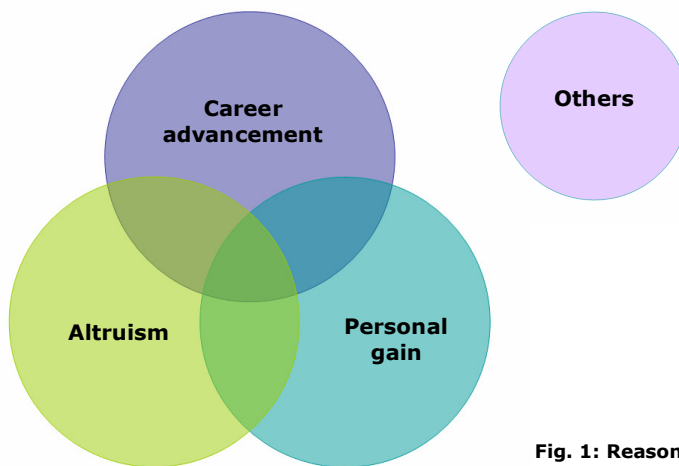


Fig. 1: Reasons for scientific writing and publishing.

successful in the application for research funding, extension of funding, and to obtain further funding.

CAREER ADVANCEMENT

Earlier reasons for documenting scientific research with the intention of disseminating information and advancing the cause of science have been substituted by the imperative to publish for individual advancement. In an academic institution, the dictums of "*publish or perish*"^{3,4} and "*publish and prosper*"⁵ are self-evident. It would be difficult to climb the academic ladder without a certain number of published papers on one's CV. Academic aspirations require one's published output to constantly grow in number and quality. In some institutions, the number and quality of publications (where the paper is published and how many times it has been cited) have a direct influence on academic ascension. Academic institutions may have other stipulations for career advancement, but selection committees will still use the publication as reselection criteria.

Publication in recognised journals is

also a requirement or recommendation for specialty accreditation by Specialty Training Committees in many training institutions. The advanced specialty trainee may need to produce evidence of having published, before being certified as having completed higher specialty training.

PERSONAL GAIN

On a personal level, scientific publication improves knowledge and judgment. Any paper written and published contributes to and adds depth to the knowledge and understanding of the topic surrounding the publication. The process widens and deepens the writer's own acumen. Good writing may require sound judgment but writing may improve judgment. It allows the writer to analyse what he or she has done, reflect on it and do better the next time. Intrinsic benefits of training gained during the process of manuscript preparation are invaluable. Scientific writing is a discipline of performing a thorough literature search, collating and analysing data, and drafting and repeatedly revising the manuscript. Authors who have manuscripts accepted and published will be much better po-

sitioned to appreciate what is written in journals. They can appreciate the writing, reviewing and editing process, and are better positioned to critically read and evaluate other articles.

For non-academic doctors, scientific publication is also beneficial. Well-published "non-academic" doctors are respected by their peers, and publications add stature to their personalities and professional respectability. The doctor will gain acknowledgement as an expert in a particular field by his or her peers. He or she may receive invitations to deliver lectures at scientific meetings, to be a member of expert panels and advisory boards and to be on reviewer and editorial boards of journals. Hence, a well-published doctor becomes "famous" not only locally but internationally. Authorship of scientific publications is also a fantastic indulgence of one's personal ego. Satisfaction and pleasure are derived from seeing your name in print and from your work being quoted by others.

Is there money involved in scientific publications? The financial gain for the individual author arises from the promotion and fame that come with being well published, eventually helping one to achieve a better-paid position. Some journals award an honorarium to the authors who manage to have an invited article published. Monetary rewards are sometimes given by institutions to their employees who successfully publish in international journals. The amount given is proportional to the impact factor of the journal in which the article is published.

BRUNEI DARUSSALAM'S PERSPECTIVE

From Brunei Darussalam's perspective, all the discussed reasons still hold true. There are however, additional local reasons why a doctor should publish. Hospitals in Brunei Darussalam are being recognised as academic institutions, in addition to the clinical services they traditionally provide. Recent collaboration of Brunei hospitals with local and overseas medical universities has seen these hospitals being recognised as teaching institutions and partner clinical schools. Publications in peer-reviewed journals are arguably the most important means to achieve international recognition for an individual institution. Increasing publications from Brunei hospitals will therefore enhance the hospital's academic prestige and international standing. Publishing research relevant to local needs will also have clinical and public health implications locally and will contribute to the larger growth of science.

It is common for doctors from Brunei Darussalam to undergo further training or fellowship attachments in overseas institutions; for the purpose of obtaining advanced training or acquiring specific knowledge and skills. These trainees often seek prestigious training in overseas centres of excellence. These training or fellowship posts are limited and hard to come by, and one always has to compete with other applicants for these prestigious posts. However, the chances of successfully securing a training post are much better if one has published. The fact that one has published signals to the potential employers that the applicant is a thinker, interested in what he or she does, and is eager to share his or her experience with others. It also sug-

gests that he or she will continue to contribute academically in his or her new position.

The National Continuing Medical Education (CME) Committee, MOH, Brunei Darussalam acknowledges the benefits of scientific publication, and awards CME credit points for publication in local and international journals. The successful attainment of the required CME credit points is one of the requirements for renewal of the Annual Practising Certificate for doctors in Brunei Darussalam.

A new Scheme of Service for doctors and dentists working with the MOH Brunei Darussalam has been approved by His Majesty's Government and soon to be implemented. The new scheme has seen the introduction of 'scientific publication in recognised journals' as one of the requirements for appointment to the newly revised Consultant grades. The criteria for eligibility for the Consultant grades now include *Basic Science or Clinical Research, Research Supervision and Publications in peer-reviewed local, regional or international journals.*⁶

The difficulties and dilemmas in scientific writing and publications faced by doctors in Brunei Darussalam are worthy of attention. The lack of infrastructure and other facilities, the time and energy spent on routine clinical responsibilities and training activities, with a less developed cultural tradition of 'documentation' all contribute to low number of publications in the country. Additionally, there is a lack of research training in many medical schools and absence of incentives for being

meaningfully productive in research and publication. The recent establishment of the Clinical Research Unit (CRU) and the Medical and Health Research and Ethics Committee (MHREC) by the MOH has gone some way in addressing the above issues. The duties and responsibilities of these bodies include the monitoring of ethical standards and providing support and encouragement in research and publications.

The above benefits for scientific publication will hopefully encourage all doctors working in the MOH, Brunei Darussalam and elsewhere to adopt a culture of scientific writing and publication. Being well published widens and deepens one's acumen, and the more one knows the better one can serve his or her patients. In addition to the knowledge and repute that come with being well published, this may eventually help to successfully apply for a Consultant post with the MOH, Brunei Darussalam.

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