

Dear sir,

re: TUBITAK symposium on "Scientific Publications in the 21st Century: Aims and Approaches"

A symposium on "Scientific Publications in the 21st Century: Aims and Approaches" was held at the Feza Gürsey lecture hall of Turkish Scientific and Technical Research Council (TUBITAK), Ankara, on 2nd November, 2001. National and International attendants as well as the audience made the symposium very productive. I followed the conference on behalf of Erciyes Medical Journal and summarized the symposium and also expressed my opinions on several topics below.

In the morning session, introductory speech was made by Professor Namık Kemal Pak, Head of TUBITAK. He gave a brief historical description of how science made a progress towards the 21st Century and also expressed his view on the future of internet and the digital technology.

Professor Emin Kansu, Chief Editor of Turkish Journal of Medicine was the chairman of the first session. Here, the first speech was given by Professor Baysal, Chief Editor of Turkish Journal of Chemistry and the member of Turkish Academy of Science. Professor Baysal emphasized the importance of impact factor (IF) as an indicator of the scientific quality of a periodical. He gave an interesting example as to how 47 journals from India cited by the Index Medicus had impact factors lower than 0.6. He continued his speech by saying that around 5500 academic periodicals in the world are published annually and that 2286 of these had IF >1, 44 IF >10 and 20 IF >17. He said researchers in our country and in many countries preferred low IF journals for the simple reason that granting a publishing in such journals was easier. Professor Baysal told that while 8000 books/annually was published in Austria with a population of 8 millions, only 9383 books/annually were published in Turkey which had a population more than 61 millions. Professor Baysal continued on by saying that in Turkey, a total of 2515 periodicals/annually are published and 644 of these are academic periodicals; among 644 academic periodicals, 172 were published by the Turkish Universities and 12 by the TUBITAK. He also expressed his thoughts on those 172 University Publications by saying that since these Turkish University Publications were not indexed by any international indexes, they must stop their publication life and possible manuscripts which will be submitted in the future to them must gradually be directed towards the 12 Scientific journals of TUBITAK. At this point, I had to intervene and express the views of Erciyes Medical Journal on this matter. I reminded him that TUBITAK once had put invaluable regulations to increase the quality of Scientific Journals to be published in Turkey and that we, as Erciyes Medical Journal followed these regulations strictly and consequently accomplished to be indexed by two internationally known indexes, namely Excerpta Medica and Chemical Abstracts, similar to the TUBITAK's 12 journals. I also told him that his statement therefore, was not true since many investigators around the world, contrary to what he has said, can

very easily reach our Journal which is among those 172 University Journals, because of these indexes.

The next speech, "Medical Publications in the 21st Century", was given by Professor Jeffrey M. Drazen, Chief Editor of 'The New England Journal of Medicine'. He told that 3600 manuscripts/annually are submitted to this leading journal and that only 250 could be published, with a rejection rate around 90%. He explained the editorial procedure in his journal by saying that chief editor rejects about 10% of the submitted manuscripts on the first hand and the remaining are evaluated by the 8 associate editors. A further 33% is rejected at this level and the remaining are sent for peer-review and around 4600 communications per year are made with this respect. He told that around 90 in-house personnel work on a full time basis and therefore, within less than one month, an author can receive an acceptance letter and the manuscript can be transmitted to the publisher. He also told that the issue of trust is very important in the evaluation procedure for any submitted manuscript; i.e. it is very important for their journal whether the authors of the submitted manuscript had been found guilty from any previous crimes such as plagiarism.

The chairman of the second session was Professor Kemal Leblecioğlu. The first talk, 'How Nature Papers are Selected' was made by Dr. Alison Abbott, the chief editor of the Nature. She emphasized the objective and independent virtues of the Nature, and that these virtues were above almost all personal and government issues and that even the British Science Ministry occasionally may have complaints from the journal for this reason. She told that 2/3 of all submitted manuscripts were rejected at first hand and the remaining were sent for peer review and among these, 1/3 are accepted. It is clear that similar to the New England Journal of Medicine, only around 10% of all submitted manuscripts are accepted by Nature. She told that not only scientist but also tax-payer citizens also get interested in the journal, because they feel that they had a right to know for which types of research projects are their tax monies spent. For the same reason, press releases are frequently made by the journal and that the press in almost all instances gets information about any title only after the journal is published. She also gave the 'cloned sheep-Dolly' as an example as to how this, in very rare instances can not be accomplished and the press can gain information before the paper is published. She also emphasized the scientific quality of the Nature by saying that most of the Nobel prize candidates or winners have their papers published initially in their journal.

The next speech was given by Professor Ersin Yurtsever from Koç University. In his speech entitled 'Potential of Scientific publications of Turkey', Professor Yurtsever also emphasized the importance of the impact factor. He told that the only medical publication from Turkey cited by the Index Medicus, Turkish Journal of Pediatrics had a low impact factor (0.12) and that many papers submitted from Turkey are directed toward low impact factor journals for the simple reason of 'easy acceptance'. Listeners from the audience generally emphasized the importance of getting patented for any possible Turkish inventions emerging from an article published in a journal and

that the international fees for getting patented is very high and that the government must financially support such inventions.

In the afternoon session, Professor Aykut Kence was the chairman and a speech entitled 'Publication Ethics in Molecular Biology and Genetics' was given by Professor Mehmet Öztürk of Bilkent University. He gave examples of non-ethical attitudes in the scientific world. He talked about the human genome project and said that the genetical information must not be used without permission.

In the last session, a panel entitled 'Publication Ethics' was made. The first panelist, Professor Drazen, gave a speech on 'Responsibilities of the Editor in Publication Ethics'. He gave the 'walnut society supported research' as an example and opened the question of 'to what extent should the reader know the sponsors of the study?'. The general view was that the readers must have a right to know the degree of involvement of any author with the sponsors and that the type of proprietary interest must be stated.

Dr. Abbott made the next talk on "Representative Cases in Publication Ethics". She gave the two leading scientists from Munich-Germany as an example to scientific fraud. She told that around 300 published papers from this team were inspected retrogradely and that in 37 of them, scientific fraud was documented and proved. She told that these scientists as well as their all co-authors were retrogradely investigated and isolated from the scientific world (2).

The last talk entitled 'The role of TUBITAK in scientific publication ethics' was made by Professor Tuğrul Tankut, from the TUBITAK. He told that ethics regulations for papers submitted to the TUBITAK journals are documented and that this information can be found on the web site, <http://www.tubitak.gov.tr/baskanlik/etik.html>.

Although the symposium was very productive, I believe the issues of the future of digital technology, digital journals, scientific fraud or crimes in web publications could have been discussed in more detail, since these issues will clearly be very important in the 21st century. I also want to believe and hope that the views reflected by Professor Baysal on the necessity of discontinuance of 172 Turkish University Publications and directing the likely submitted papers to these journals towards TUBITAK's 12 journals, is solely nothing more than being his personal view. I believe that these are not TUBITAK's official view on University publications since the main role of TUBITAK, as has always been, is to promote such publications and regularly check the quality of them in terms of its published regulations. I also believe that other University Journals from Turkey, which have not yet been indexed by any of the international indexes will probably be accepted to such indexes similar to our journal, Erciyes Tıp Dergisi (Erciyes Medical Journal) provided they follow the excellent regulations published by TUBITAK.

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