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Publish or Perish?

One of the “occupational hazards” of academic work is the need (or should I say pressure?) to publish. Indeed, there is evidence that interest in research, the influence of a role model or mentor, and the desire to be challenged intellectually are factors that influence physicians to enter academic medicine.¹ Scholarly activities of various types are prized among us academic types! So, we labor away to prepare our research studies, collecting meaningful data and eventually transforming it into a variety of formats: presentations, posters, abstracts, workshops and journal articles. And, articles that are published in peer-reviewed journals are often viewed as the “gold standard” associated with a successful academic career. If a faculty member is interested in being promoted to higher level ranks in academia, the success rate in getting articles published is a widely used metric at the time of performance review for promotion. This likely means that there are increasing numbers of faculty members who seek to have their work presented in scholarly publications, especially in the field of medical education.

In recent years, the business model for many academic journals has changed to what is now known as an “open access” approach. The term “open access” is described as “free, unrestricted access to electronic versions of scholarly publications.”² The business model passes along some of the publication costs to the authors of published articles, in the form of publication fees. At the recent national meeting of the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), I attended a very interesting session that delved into the open access model including some of the potential pitfalls that have resulted from this new way of doing business. The presenters asked whether the pressures to publish and the relatively recent adoption of this new business model have resulted in the development of open access journals of less than stellar quality. This outstanding session really opened my eyes to the need to be very discriminating when it comes to selecting a journal to which one might wish to submit an article! The authors categorized the “landscape” of open access publishing using a color coding scheme that has been adopted widely among publishers and librarians. The colors ranged from grey (the so-called “predatory” journals) to gold (peer-reviewed reputable journals). Of particular concern are the predatory journals, which are characterized by rapid review, high costs to the author in charged fees (often in the thousands of dollars), no apparent academic affiliation or expertise among the listed members of the journal’s oversight group, and sometimes even re-publication of papers from other outlets.

The take-away message? Be careful to thoroughly evaluate a given journal, prior to submitting a manuscript! There is an online Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ)³ which lists member journals that are committed to high quality, peer-reviewed open access publishing. If the journal you are considering is open access but is not listed on the DOAJ site, you may want to find another outlet for your work. Perhaps we also need more widespread use of available metrics (such as impact factors) to assess the quality of a given journal; what do you think? As you seek to publish your work, be on the lookout for future developments in this area!

¹ Strauss SE et al. Career Choice in Academic Medicine: Systematic Review. *Journal of General Internal Medicine* 2006; 21 (12): 1222-9.

² Bjork BC et al. Anatomy of Green Open Access. *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology* 2014; 65 (2): 237-50.

³ Directory of Open Access Journals, <https://doaj.org/>

-David Musick, PhD

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Quote of the Month

“...The profession has become obsessed with quantity rather than quality. One brilliant article should outweigh one mediocre book.”

-Camille Paglia



Dean's Corner

Cynda Johnson, MD, MBA

For the second year in a row, one of our own was honored in the national arena at the Association for American Medical Colleges (AAMC) annual meeting earlier this month in Boston. Dr. Rick Vari, senior dean for academic affairs at the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine, won the [Alpha Omega Alpha Robert J. Glaser Distinguished Teacher Award](#), a prestigious national honor bestowed upon faculty members who have distinguished themselves in medical student education. You will recall that last year at the AAMC conference, Dr. Carol Gilbert won the [Arnold P. Gold Foundation Humanism in Medicine Award](#).

While Rick is not one to tout his own accomplishments, I will do it for him! Rick was one of my first hires when I came to the medical school in 2007. At that time, one of the priorities of the leadership was that the school implement a problem-based learning (PBL) curriculum. Several national leaders in medical education recommended Rick to me - and for good reason. Rick had implemented a PBL program at the University of North Dakota School of Medicine and Health Sciences, which then had a successful LCME site visit under the new curriculum. Rick also brought early experience with interprofessional education, another priority for our school's early leaders. At that time, very few medical schools had a required interprofessional element in their curricula. As a result of Rick's oversight of VTCSOM's academic programs, our students are excelling at medical school and thriving in residency training.

Rick is one of the most energetic, engaging, and effective teachers I have ever known. He is one of a kind. He teaches his students from his heart; his passion for his work is infectious; he leads his faculty by example; and he is revered by his students, who have given him multiple teaching awards at every school in his academic career.

Please join me in congratulating and thanking Rick for a superb job.



Dr. Richard Vari with Dr. Marsha Rappley, past chair of the AAMC Board of Directors, and Dr. Richard Byyny, executive director of the Alpha Omega Alpha Medical Honor Society.