

PJO at 50: Why Publish!

Patricia M. Khu, MD^{1,2}

¹Philippine Eye Research Institute, University of the Philippines, Manila

²Cardinal Santos Medical Center, San Juan

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The Philippine Journal of Ophthalmology (PJO) has come a long way since its inception. It was organized in 1969 to document the works of local ophthalmologists in search of novel treatment and understanding of eye diseases among Filipinos. It served as a forum for exchange of ideas and teaching so needed in clinical practice and keeping abreast of new development. Under the leadership of Romeo Fajardo, the founding editor-in-chief (1969-1999), PJO became the standard bearer of scientific development in eye research in the Philippines documenting the works of known Filipino researchers, such as Geminiano de Ocampo,¹⁻⁷ Salvador Salceda,⁷⁻¹⁴ Romeo Espiritu,^{15-19,26} Romeo Fajardo,²⁰⁻²⁶ Mario Valenton,²⁷⁻³⁶ Mario Aquino, Sr.,^{6,37-45} Manuel Agulto,⁴⁶⁻⁵⁰ and Rossina Alejo-Ramirez,^{8,10,51-59} who became the second editor-in-chief (2000-2003). Most of the publication in the seventies and eighties were the results of studies conducted at the Philippine General Hospital (PGH) and the Philippine Eye Research Institute.¹

In the latter eighties and nineties, more focus was given to capacity building and improving the training programs in ophthalmology. Conferences and workshops conducted by international experts were organized to introduce new techniques in cataract and vitreo-retinal surgeries. Many were interested in learning phacoemulsification surgery and intraocular lens implantation. Achieving excellent surgical outcomes superseded basic understanding of diseases and its pathophysiology. It was easier and more rewarding to perform surgeries than to develop study protocols and write manuscripts. Over time, the publication of the issues became irregular.

In 2004, PJO was acquired by the Philippine Academy of Ophthalmology (PAO) with the aim of making it the official publication of the Academy.⁶⁰ It provided an opportunity for ophthalmologists and

vision scientists to showcase their works and spur further research.

Why Publish?

There are many reasons why researchers, especially those in the scientific field, publish. Foremost, is the need to document what have been accomplished, legacies of lifetime works that are usually the result of hard labor. If never published, such works did not exist at all since they were not shared. If not written down and disseminated, research accomplishments and innovations that were kept to a few could easily be forgotten. The results of these researches when published will lead to new scientific knowledge and better understanding of diseases and their treatments, and ultimately to better health care. They will be referenced and cited. The First,⁶¹ Second,⁶² and Third⁶³ National Survey of Blindness published by Rossina Ramirez, Evangeline Santos, and Leo Cubillan, respectively, provided prevalence rates of different eye diseases in the country. In the Second and Third National Surveys, the teams went to different regions of the Philippines and did sampling in key areas. Members of selected households were examined. It took several years to plan the survey, write the protocol, look for funding, collect and analyze the data, and eventually publish the results in several scientific journals, both locally and abroad. Henceforth, the surveys became the main source of prevalence rates of eye diseases in the Philippines.

When researchers publish their works, they become experts in the chosen field studied, analyzing the data collected, and comparing the results to published literature. Critically reviewing the works of others and comparing them will lead to deeper understanding of the problem and spurring future

exploration. The works of Romeo Espiritu and colleagues¹⁵⁻¹⁹ provided rich sources of information in understanding the pathophysiology and histopathology of retinoblastoma. Romeo Fajardo and Rosie Noche^{20-24,64-65} studied the causes of uveitis and optic neuritis among Filipinos, delving into the pathophysiology and treatment. Mario Valenton, Jacinto Dy-Liacco, and Cesar Espiritu³⁵ published a 20-year survey on the different cornea and external disease problems in the Philippines. The many years of data collection from patients seen at the PGH by Mario Valenton³⁶ and colleagues provided rich sources of information on the presentation and treatment response of the different infections suffered by Filipinos and all were supported by laboratory findings. Their works were frequently cited.

Writing a scientific paper is not easy; it requires many reiterations. The thoroughness with which it is written, using the correct words and punctuations, grouping similar concepts or arguments in the same paragraph, arranging them in order of importance -- all of these require familiarity and experience in writing a scientific paper. Thereafter, the manuscript is subjected to peer review and further editing. All these can be difficult and time consuming. But as one continues to submit articles for publication, experience and satisfaction can be achieved, leading to improved writing and research skills. Constant publication can lead to new opportunities for collaboration with other researchers.

Overall, being involved in the publication process is hard work recognized by the academia and employers. Most promotions in the academe are based on the amount and quality of publication. If one is pursuing a graduate degree or higher position of employment, such endeavor is also an example of leadership and drive. When universities are ranked according to their places in the world, the amount of publications and the type of researches they are involved with are given top priorities. When countries are ranked according to their scientific and economic developments, the amount and type of publications are taken into consideration.

What Have Been Done?

In the last 15 years, PJO, under dedicated editors, has consistently improved the quality of its publication.

Under the leadership of Patricia Khu, the third editor-in-chief (2004-2015), there was a reorganization of the editorial board with international linkages and a new cover and format for the journal. A more rigorous peer review system was instituted by inviting leading experts in the field to be reviewers. Aside from original articles and case reports, more sections were added, such as reviews, practice guidelines, highlights from international meetings, debates on controversial topics, and so forth.⁶⁶ PJO encouraged and published readers' comments for more constructive discussion of issues relevant to the published article and to continually promote a culture of investigating new knowledge and answers to problems encountered in the practice of eye care. For these efforts, the PJO is Western Pacific Region Index Medicus (WPRIM)-indexed since 2009, an initiative of the World Health Organization to encourage publication and readership in the Asia-Pacific region.⁶⁷

PJO is also available primarily online since 2010, making it more accessible to the PAO membership and to the scientific community at large. This shift to electronic access increases its international readership and citation as well.

What Still Needs To Be Done?

Progress requires continuous improvements in order to achieve the status of a premier journal. Electronic submission was started in 2016 and is ongoing, including an online, systematic, peer review system with guidelines on quality review instituted by Paolo Antonio Silva, the fourth editor-in-chief (2016-2017).⁶⁸ A plagiarism check is also utilized.⁶⁸ On-time publication, at least 1-2 months before due date, is strictly being implemented by the current editor-in-chief, Franz Marie Cruz (2018-current). This means that the contents for the next issue are laid out at least 4 months ahead of time. With increasing submission of original articles, not just from young researchers but seasoned scientists, this will eventually lead to increased rate of publication. The ultimate goal is to make the PJO the resource where Philippine ophthalmologists and vision scientists will look to for new knowledge. And when the quality of original articles published improves, this will lead to international recognition, frequent citation, and eventual Medline[®] accreditation.

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