

Editorial Commentary

Abstract Issue: Promoting Science at State Medical Colleges

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Writing a thesis is an important stage in a postgraduate student's intellectual and scientific development. It gives an evidence of a student's abilities about their scientific focus, capacity for literature review, clearly formulated problem definition, adequacy and execution of research design, performing original study, appropriate analysis of results, defending a coherent argument and to draw valid conclusions. Competence in writing and expression is of utmost importance at every stage of thesis. An abstract is a brief summary of a research article, thesis or review and is often used to help the reader quickly ascertain the paper's purpose.¹

Abstract is a powerful statement describing a larger work. Its main assignment is to grab attention and evoke curiosity. An abstract typically outlines following elements relevant to the completed work, viz.:² (i) provide context or background for the study and should state the study's purpose; (ii) provide basic procedures- selection of study participants, settings, measurements, analytical methods; (iii) present main findings giving specific effect sizes and their statistical and clinical significance, if possible; and (iv) outline principal conclusions. The ABC's of writing an abstract should always be kept in mind- Accuracy, Brevity and Clarity.

There are multiple types of abstracts and include (a) the informative abstract, also known as the complete abstract. This is a compendious summary of a paper's substance including its background, purpose, methodology, results, and conclusion. Informative abstracts may be viewed as stand-alone documents;³ (b) the descriptive abstract, also known as the limited abstract or the indicative abstract, provides a description of what the paper covers without delving into its substance;³ and (c) the graphical abstract

where a graphic is intended to summarize or be an exemplar for the main thrust of the article. It is not intended to be as exhaustive a summary as the text abstract, rather it is supposed to indicate the type, scope and technical coverage of the article at a glance. The use of graphical abstracts has been generally well received by the scientific community.⁴ The art of writing a good abstract is one of the important aspects of writing a paper. Abstract reveals the main focus of the paper and informed judgement can be made about whether it is relevant to the purpose of researcher and also for indexing purpose. Most academic journal databases accessed through library enable abstract search allowing quick retrieval by the users.

Good science, good research and patients will be the victims unless there is a free exchange of health information worldwide.⁵ The members of the journal committee of Rajasthan University of Health Sciences (RUHS) proposed the concept of publishing an abstract issue to disseminate research knowledge in the field of health science, to give visibility to research in the state of Rajasthan, and to encourage and strengthen the interaction of academic research. Publishing abstracts is significant in many aspects. Researchers will be exposed to new ideas, creating awareness about latest development and findings in research and medicine. This shall also create a data bank of research being conducted in various medical colleges affiliated to Rajasthan University of Health Sciences.

ABSTRACT QUALITY ASSESSMENT

Postgraduate students (MD/MS/PhD) of all affiliated medical colleges of RUHS were directed to write abstract of their thesis as per the International Consortium of

Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) guidelines.² More than 200 abstracts of thesis of postgraduate students of various medical colleges affiliated to Rajasthan University of Health Sciences were received and evaluated. The evaluation of abstract quality was carried out by a panel of experts belonging to basic, paraclinical and clinical sciences. The criteria of guidelines were designed to ensure that abstract represents a standard of quality appropriate for publication. Quality assessment guidelines for abstract evaluation were finalised by the members of the journal committee of RUHS. The following quality assessment guidelines were used:

1. Is the question and/or objective sufficiently described?
2. Is the design evident and appropriate to answer study question?
3. Were the methods of subject selection described?
4. Is the outcome measure well defined and robust to measurement bias?
5. Is sample size adequate?
6. Use of appropriate statistical analysis.
7. Are the results reported in sufficient detail?
8. Do the results support the conclusion?
9. Have the limitations of the study mentioned?

All the abstracts were evaluated using these guidelines and each was given a score. We have included 76 top-

ranking abstracts in this issue. We believe that ubiquitous sharing of knowledge promotes interdisciplinary work which is the essence of scientific temper. In summary, the abstract issue of the journal gives the researchers a flavour and bare bone information of what kind of research is being carried out at various affiliated medical colleges of our university and is fundamentally aimed to share knowledge and to promote scientific temper⁶ and research.

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