

Editorial

Quality and honesty in publications vs quantity

A few weeks ago, Prof. David Collingridge, editor in chief of The Lancet Oncology published by Elsevier gave an excellent lecture on “How to write a world class scientific article” and we continued with a workshop on the same topic conducted by Medical Journal of Indonesia and Medical Research Unit Faculty of Medicine, Universitas Indonesia (FMUI).

In between, the Medical Faculty held the evaluation of the most successful individual researchers and the most successful research departments. Awarded were the best poster presentations and publications not only in our own journal but also in international journals. In the evaluation, we had publications on high international level and we had manuscripts and presentations, which did not yet reach this level.

The wide range of differences in quality depends in parts on the field, because clinical, biomedical or epidemiological investigations have different criteria. However, these obvious differences do not need to be discussed. What is more surprising are great quality differences in the same field of research and even in the same Department. The reason may be that there is no strong research authority and guidance in our Departments. In world class research universities, the Head of Department, who is generally a research-experienced professor, determines the standards of research. Regular research discussions between researchers in our Departments (instead of frequent administrative meetings) would certainly help to stimulate scientific proficiency. Those who are more experienced in each Department should support those who still need guidance in research and in publishing. This attitude would, furthermore, reduce selfish ambitions and create an academic atmosphere, which still needs to be developed at our Faculty.

Medical Journal of Indonesia and Medical Research Unit FMUI try to stimulate our researchers to write and publish in English, and in general, there are two ways; one way to write in Bahasa Indonesia first and then translate it into English and the other way, which should actually be the first choice, to write in English immediately, even if the own proficiency is still low and the English needs to be improved. This is still better than to write in Bahasa Indonesia and to have the text translated into English by a professional interpreter or language editing office. Although this is possible and we even offer this possibility to our colleagues, it

should not be the first, but the last choice, because there will not be any “learning effect”. How else should we train the proper use of scientific English as the present *lingua franca* in science. Formerly, it was Latin, then German, both languages with much more difficult formal grammar and today, our scientific medical terminology is still derived from ancient Greek and Latin.

Even if Bahasa Indonesia is used in scientific writing, terminology must be appropriate and adjusted to medical and anatomical accuracy. Recently, a neurological report used “Hipokampus” and “Hipotalamus” as the Indonesian anatomical terms; one must say that this medical terminology is inappropriate. If the Indonesian way of writing cannot differentiate between “Hippocampus” (derived from Greek hippos = horse) and “Hypothalamus” (from Geek hypo = below, under), the original scientific terminology must be used instead of “Indonesionized” terms.

Especially as medical doctors, we should be concerned about the proper use of language whether it may be Bahasa Indonesia or English, Greek or Latin, because the use of language determines our way of thinking (and *vice versa*)¹⁻³ and if we don’t care, it may result in the wrong medication on a patient’s prescription (as observed recently) because of mixing up “hypo” and “hyper”. This is the practical outcome of improper and careless use of language and terminology.

Whatever method of writing is applied and how difficult it may seem to write in English, Medical Journal of Indonesia and Medical Research Unit FMUI help with language editing. However, as Prof. Collingridge pointed out, “ghost-writing” does not exist in science. Whoever is involved in the preparation of the manuscript has to be disclosed or acknowledged. Otherwise it is plagiarism.

Another statement is strongly propagated by Elsevier Publisher: “don’t submit salami articles”.⁴ This often occurs in Indonesia. DIKTI and DRPMUI try to increase the quantity of publications. Hence, research results are published very quickly, bit by bit in thin slices (like an Italian salami sausage) and the scientific value of these manuscripts becomes as thin as the salami slices. The result is a flood of low quality manuscripts. Compile your data, combine them and publish your results in a high quality article to avoid the frequent evaluation of international reviewers that the scientific content of Indonesian manuscripts is still weak. In this context, it is not soothing that also about 80% of Chinese manuscripts are still rejected by international journals. Considering the increasing flood of manuscripts we do not need more low level writing, which wastes the time

of researchers, reviewers and editors, we need more high quality publications.

And we need more honesty: our ambition as researchers stimulates us to publish positive results. Hence, we tend to interpret our results accordingly. As D. Sarewitz warned in *Nature* this month, “beware the creeping cracks of bias”⁵ in biomedical research and publications. We must be careful not to let our ambition become too selfish and success-oriented. The Latin origin *ambitio* derives from “walking around” with the subliminal meaning of searching for possibilities and helpers for personal advantage, in a sense that closely meets the Indonesian “*cari muka*”. This attitude does not match academic atmosphere and scientific honesty. It is up to us as researchers and medical practitioners to keep our ambition ethical and compliant with academic honesty. Unfortunately, the external and internal pressures to produce results and publish them rapidly jeopardize scientific objectivity and academic honesty worldwide.

Finally, a personal remark appears to be necessary in the context of honesty: the Abdul Bari Saifuddin Award 2011 of Medical Journal of Indonesia in Basic Medical Research was granted to a publication, in which my wife was first author and I, myself, the corresponding author.⁶ Rumors of collusion and nepotism arose in the Medical Faculty UI about this award. Therefore, it must be clearly stated that the Peer Reviewing Committee of the Abdul Bari Saifudin Award decided independently

(Letter number 04/MJI-ABW/11/2011) on January 20, 2012 and did not involve one of us or one of the co-authors in the Board of Reviewers.

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