INTRODUCTION

The assessment of the performance of medical teachers is a difficult task. However, it should be fair and just. The underlying aim of such assessment should be to improve the quality of medical teaching and medical research. The Medical Council of India (MCI) is the statutory body entrusted with the responsibility of establishing and maintaining high standards of medical education. It has laid down certain guidelines for appointments and promotions of teachers in medical institutions in India. Publication of research articles is one of the essential requirements for promotion of medical teachers. The MCI’s initial guidelines for promotion to the position of Associate Professor and Professor required publication of at least two research papers by the candidates. Though the intention was to streamline the process of promotion of teachers and give impetus as well as due credit to research in academic institutions, the ‘clarification’ issued by MCI in September 2015 on what constitutes ‘research publications’ for promotion of teaching faculty of medical colleges/institutions in India has sparked a controversy and is a matter of debate among medical teachers. This clarification has raised several issues with regards to index agencies, type of articles to be considered, criteria for National/International journal, authorship, and e-journals.

While an editorial in the Indian Journal of Medical Ethics, labelled this circular as a regressive trend by MCI, an editorial in the Journal of Postgraduate Medicine questioned whether this was the right way to consider research publications for academic advancement. A special editorial by some of the editors of the Indian Association of Medical Articles, Promotions, Medical Education, Publications, Authorship.
MATERIALS AND METHODS

The mean number of publications were 9.47. (Mean ± SD= 10.86±7.97).

The total number of medical teachers in the institute were approximately 253. Assuming 95% confidence interval, with an alpha error of 5%, a sample size of 153 was calculated. [Calculated using www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.html]

RESULTS

One hundred and fifty-three completely filled questionnaires were collected from medical teachers of various departments with different designations of an urban tertiary care teaching hospital over a period of one month.

Of the 153 medical teachers, 17 were Professors, 65 were Associate Professors and 71 were Assistant Professors.

The teaching experience was in the range of 1-35 years. (Mean±SD= 10.86±7.97).

The mean number of publications were 9.47.

Table 1 Frequency of Responses to statements on Index Agencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria for National/International journals</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Discrimination of publications in national/international journals is justified.</td>
<td>17 42 68 10 11.11% (27.45%) (10.45%) (44.44%) (6.53%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. National journals publish research that is more relevant to the local population.</td>
<td>34 75 44 00 (22.22%) (49.01%) (28.76%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most medical teachers (44.44%) disagree to the discrimination of publications in national and international journals. A large number of medical teachers (49.01%) and 22.22% of them strongly agree that national journals publish research that is more relevant to the local population.

The responses obtained for authorship criteria are depicted in Table 4.

The responses for criteria on e-journals is shown in Table 5. Most medical teachers strongly agree that e-journals give access to knowledge regardless of location (53.60%). They also strongly agree that e-journals are cost-effective and eco-friendly (63.40%). Majority medical teachers strongly agree
that e-journals with reputed indexing should be considered for performance assessment (52.94%).

**Table 4 Frequency of Responses to statements on Criteria for Authorship**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria for authorship</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Limiting credit to the 1st and 2nd author is too restrictive.</td>
<td>92 (60.13%)</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Author with significant contribution should get due credit as 1st or 2nd author.</td>
<td>62 (40.52%)</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Collaborative and multi-disciplinary research would be affected by limiting credit</td>
<td>109 (71.24%)</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Senior academicians might use their position to secure 1st / 2nd authorship.</td>
<td>88 (57.51%)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Names of contributing authors in alphabetical order acknowledges each one’s</td>
<td>05 (3.26%)</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>contribution equally.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No correlation was seen between the designation of medical teachers and their statements nor was any correlation obtained between the years of teaching experience, a number of publications and responses obtained.

**DISCUSSION**

The clarification issued by the Medical Council of India on research publication guidelines for promotion raised certain issues. However, most issues have been discussed as editorials in various journals. The perceptions and opinions of medical teachers in an urban tertiary teaching hospital have not been summarized in any journal, to the best of my knowledge.

We did a questionnaire based survey of 153 medical teachers and studied their perceptions to the new guidelines issued by the Medical Council of India. We found that most medical teachers have similar opinions to the various issues raised through this circular.

A large number of medical teachers either agree or strongly agree that indexing criteria should involve other acceptable and reputed index agencies besides the ones mentioned in the MCI circular. Most of the medical teachers believe that publications in index journals give more value and credibility. The quality of journals cannot be solely adjudged on indexing and inclusion in select databases. However, there is no direct measure of quality when it comes to publications in journals. Since indexation and quality are subjective criteria, a broader list of approved index agencies should be suggested since most teachers believe that index journals have more value.

Most medical teachers are of the opinion that case reports, editorials, and reviews contribute to science. The proposal to award points only to original research articles leads to a wrong notion that other sections of journals which deal with critical thinking and independent scientific outlook do not carry any value. This will either result in malpractices or a further decline in the overall outlook of medical teachers to publications and the Medical Council of India. A mixed opinion was obtained with respect to the omission of systematic reviews and meta-analyses. Some of them agree to the omission while some of them disagree. One-third of medical teachers are not sure whether this omission is justified. More than 90% medical teachers are of the opinion that credit points should be awarded to publications other than original articles. Thus, the Medical Council of India should re-look into this debatable issue and not neglect other forms of scientific communications as they are equally important.

A large number of medical teachers feel that discrimination of publications in national and international journals is not justified. More than half of them agree that national journals publish research that is more relevant to the local population. The terms national or International do not define the quality of a journal. The unclear distinction between national and international journals in spite of index criteria for publication makes the ‘clarification’ unclear.

The new circular limits credit to the first two authors only. This is too restrictive and none of the medical teachers disagree to this. Though almost all medical teachers feel that author with significant contribution should get due credit as the first or second author, they believe that collaborative and multi-disciplinary research would be affected by limiting credit to the first two authors. More than half of them also believe that senior academicians might use their position unfairly to secure first or second authorship. This move by the Medical Council of India might bring a halt to gift authorship. On the other hand, this move could lead to the complete discrediting of junior researchers, since the senior academicians might not give due credit to juniors as a first or second author. This flipside is what most medical teachers are wary of, according to our survey. To avoid this competition for first and/or second authorship, we enquired if medical teachers believed that names of contributing authors in alphabetical order acknowledges each one’s contribution equally. We obtained mixed responses for this statement, but there was an inclination towards the agreement side. This shows that a large number of medical teachers do research not only for promotions but also to contribute to science.

In this era of digitalization, most journals are being published only in the electronic format. The medical Council of India, however, excludes publications in e-journals for the purpose of promotions. In our study, we questioned medical teachers with respect to the importance of e-journals in the modern era. We
found that all medical teachers either agree or strongly agree that e-journals give access to knowledge regardless of location. They firmly believe that e-journals are cost-effective and eco-friendly. All medical teachers suggested that e-journals with reputed indexing should be considered for performance assessment.

A uniform response was obtained for most questions with respect to the circular issued by the Medical Council of India. A larger nation-wide study could be planned in the near future to include more medical teachers. Their suggestions could bring about certain changes in the current guidelines.

CONCLUSION

The present study voices the opinions of medical teachers in response to the new circular. Though the intentions of the Medical Council of India to evaluate teachers on the basis of research publications is seen in positive light, certain ambiguities and issues need to be resolved. This study gives an impetus to the Medical Council of India to rethink, relook and revise the current guidelines. These guidelines not only affect promotions or research, it affects the medical education system and the medical profession at large.

References


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