

The IJHBT Editorial Board's Journey (2013–2019)

Pankaj Malhotra¹ · Prashant Sharma¹

Published online: 22 October 2019

© Indian Society of Hematology and Blood Transfusion 2019

Prof. Hara Prasad Pati's tenure as the Editor-in-Chief (2013–2019) were crucial years for the growth of this journal. As his term draws to a close, we examine how in this period India's flagship hematology journal took large strides towards becoming an independent established voice in the field. The entire editorial board wish to acknowledge the immense contribution from Prof. Pati here.

The groundwork had already been laid by the previous editors. IJHBT was indexed in PubMed Central, and the partnership with Springer had been initiated. However, no major breakthrough had been achieved as there was no structural change in content, restructuring of internal management or managing backlog of manuscripts or delay in processing of submitted manuscripts. Therefore, the Impact factor languished below 0.2 only.

Prof. Pati, who was till recently Professor of Haematology at the All India Institute of Medical Science in New Delhi took over as Editor-in-Chief of the IJHBT in mid-2013. With his wisdom, experience and leadership, he quickly assembled a team of like-minded academics to form a robust team in the new Editorial Board. Apart from the two authors of this article, this initially included Dr. Tathagata Chatterjee from AFMC, Pune, Dr. Naveen Kakkar from CMC Ludhiana, Dr. Auro Viswabandya from CMC Vellore and Dr. Rajan Kapoor from Command Hospital, Pune. Amidst a flurry of email communications, the first meeting of this board was held on June 14, 2014.

It was realized that the backlog was enormous, waiting times for authors to get a first peer-review report sometimes stretched into years, and getting high quality

manuscript submissions was going to be a formidable challenge. Since the workload clearly necessitated more Associate Editors, by the second meeting on the side-lines of the Haematocon 2014 at Hyderabad, several experts from India had been suggested, shortlisted, invited and included in the now expanded Editorial Board. The ones who have continued on it since were Dr. Rakhee Kar from JIPMER, Puducherry, Dr. Suchet Sachdev from PGIMER, Chandigarh, Dr. Rahul Naithani from Max Hospital, Delhi, Dr. Poonkuzhali Balasubraminan from CMC, Vellore, Dr. Monica Sharma from Safdurjang Hospital, Delhi, Dr. R.S. Malhi from Mumbai, Dr. Seema Tyagi from AIIMS, Delhi and Dr. Sanjeevan Sharma from Army Hospital (R&R), Delhi. Dr. Suman Pramanik, Dr. Pankhi Dutta, Dr. Jayandharan G. Rao and Dr. R.V. Shaji, made periodic but valuable contributions.

Dr. Pati took some hard decisions very quickly. The huge backlog of case reports was published in two "online-only" mega issues. The instructions to authors were revamped, with the "Case Report" category being abolished entirely, and an "Images in Hematology" submission introduced instead. These images and correspondence were later shifted to online-only publication. The responsibility for publishing the yearly ISHBT Annual Conference abstracts issues was shifted to the organizing committee of the conference to smoothen communication. The efficient Springer team of Dr. Naren Aggarwal and Ms. Teena Bedi made helpful suggestions to enhance the impact of the journal, and these were adopted. They were helped by Ms. Saranya Karunakaran Sekar, Mr. Mohamed Shanawaz, Ms. Suganya Maharajan, Mr. Pushkaraj Misal and others in production and copyediting teams.

Obtaining rapid, high-quality reviews was a priority and lists of reviewers had to be overhauled. Emails were sent out to the reviewers requesting updates to their areas of

✉ Prashant Sharma
prashant.sh@gmail.com

¹ Chandigarh, India

interest. Dr. Pati introduced the ISHBT Best Reviewer Awards and an Annual Reviewer Acknowledgement section was added to the journal. Turn-around times for reviews were (and partly, remain) a problem, and the entire Editorial Board put in voluntary academic effort into ensuring that a first decision, especially one of rejection, was speedily communicated to authors. The editors were on the look-out always for good science, and research from India was encouraged, even if not strictly novel, if criteria for scientific rigorousness were met.

Unforeseen and tricky problems were encountered. Whether or not to publish industry-sponsored papers and guidelines, how to deal with alleged plagiarism in already published papers, how to settle disputes between co-authors, how to gently let authors (who are also professional colleagues) know that the self-citation in their paper was probably getting excessive and how to handle conflicts-of-interest as well as requests for rapid acceptance/publication... these and other aspects of editorship were learnt and dealt with as a group along the way. Since physical meetings posed logistical issues, an Editorial Board WhatsApp group was launched for faster, clearer communication and quicker decisions.

The team efforts and the focussed leadership bore fruit and the current Editorial team takes pride in the fact that the IJHBT's impact factor (IF) has improved from 0.234 in

2013 to 0.869 in 2019, despite the two mega case-report issues (a necessary evil as those reports were already accepted) dragging it down. Submissions have risen from 360 in 2013 to over 500 currently, the acceptance rate has fallen from 53.9% to less than 25% now, and average time from submission to first decision (the most stubborn statistic to budge) that was 195 days in 2011 is less than 100 days now.

But it's not a time to rest on laurels. The journal has miles to go and has great potential.

In parting, being a part of the IJHBT's Editorial Board during this dynamic phase and watching it grow was a highly informative experience for the entire group. We learnt many things, made new connections, and hope to have the pleasure of seeing the journal achieve still higher pinnacles of success.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Informed Consent Does not apply to this paper.

Human Participants and Animal Rights Does not apply to this paper.