



Correspondence and Communications



Wasted research time and its impact on training in plastic surgery

Dear Sir,

Consultants and trainees are required to provide a portfolio of their contribution to scientific journals for appraisal and for the recruitment process. In the quest for publishable papers, many projects are started that never reach the end goal of publication. Furthermore, there is evidence of increasing numbers of poor quality research being added to the growing body of scientific literature.¹

In this survey, we aimed to determine the scale of the problem of incomplete projects by Plastic Surgery trainees. A survey of 50 trainees from three different UK centres at various stages of their training was carried out.

The results demonstrate 72% of respondents had up to 5 “failed publications”. In 53% of unpublished projects, the juniours felt this was because of their own lack of motivation while in 44% it was due to lack of supervisor support. 76% were purely undertaking research to augment their CV. 53% felt pressured into doing research. In 42%, the sole contribution of the senior author was the original idea. 33% of respondents had spent between 6 weeks and 6 months on the unpublished project and 59% would not have invested in the project had they known it was not publishable.

Scientific writing is currently not part of most UK medical school curricula. The poor quality of much medical research is widely acknowledged.¹⁻³ The effects of the pressure to publish may be seen in the increase in scientific fraud, much of which is minor, and is likely to escape detection.¹ It may also be seen in the huge number of incomplete projects.

Large amounts of money are invested in research which is flawed through inappropriate design, unrepresentative samples, small samples, incorrect methods of analysis, and faulty interpretation.³ The conclusions of scientific papers are usually based on subjective opinion rather than expressing an objective view and although medical journals invest considerable effort in getting papers refereed by statisticians; few papers are rejected solely on statistical grounds.⁴

In this study, we have not looked at the quality of the papers produced. Our results demonstrate a great deal of time

is wasted on incomplete projects which could be invested in other training pursuits including training on producing good quality research. Furthermore in a system of “publish or perish”, poor quality research is being encouraged and produced.¹ The system should encourage perhaps less but better research which is done for the right reasons. Focusing on quality of publications rather than quantity could be a start.

Funding

No funding has been received for this work.

Competing interest

The authors have no competing interest and have no commercial associations with any products mentioned.

References

1. Altman DG. The scandal of poor medical research, editorial. *BMJ* 1994; **308**:283. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj>.
2. Pocock SJ, Hughes MD, Lee RJ. Statistical problems in the reporting of clinical trials. A survey of three medical journals. *N Engl J Med* 1987; **317**:426-32.
3. Andersen B. *Methodological errors in medical research. An incomplete catalogue*. Oxford: Blackwell; 1990.
4. Bailar JC, Mosteller F, Bailar JC. Communicating with a scientific audience. In: Bailar JC, Mosteller F, editors. *Medical uses of statistics*. Waltham, MA: NEJM Books; 1986. p. 325-37.

S. Sepehripour
Queen Elizabeth University Hospital, Birmingham
Mindelsohn Way, Birmingham B15 2TH, United Kingdom

E-mail address: sarvnazsephri@googlemail.com

B.S. Dheansa
Queen Victoria Hospital, East Grinstead, United Kingdom

Crown Copyright © 2019 Published by Elsevier Ltd on behalf of British Association of Plastic, Reconstructive and Aesthetic Surgeons. All rights reserved.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bjps.2019.06.033>