

# Short history of just mentorship and support

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## Short History of Just Mentorship and Support

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Since its foundation in 1992, the *Croatian Medical Journal (CMJ)* has followed the strict standards of quality in the scientific publishing. However, the Journal has been aware that its specific position demands more than just following the already established rules. From the very beginning, the Journal declared an “author-helpful policy,” stating that “journal editors should have a major role in training authors in science communication, especially in smaller and developing scientific communities. Journal authors usually send scientifically acceptable but poorly prepared articles and it is a pity to lose valid data because of their poor presentation.” (1,2).

In brief, the editors and editorial staff of the *CMJ* have been well aware that the skills of scientific reporting and publishing in our academic community are not developed and that valuable research results and valid data are being lost because of poor presentation. To be perfectly honest, ten years ago this statement looked like a nice promise, one of the many we in academic medicine learnt not to take too seriously.

### Personal experience

When we established the School of Medicine at the Mostar University in 1997, we had plenty of enthusiasm, but the means and re-

sources, both human and material, were scarce. From the start, our principal objective was to approach European standards; anything less did not make much sense. At the time, there was formal and informal evidence indicating that medical education in our region was not of high quality. Our graduation certificates were not readily accepted worldwide, the number of international students studying in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BH) was lower than 30 or 40 years ago, and our students and teaching staff were not included in the European mobility scheme. We had to face the truth, which is not always a pleasant thing to do, but is surely useful.

The war and post-war hardships were no longer a good enough excuse for all of our problems, misconduct, and failures. Hard work needed to be done in order to overcome the problems, but the hardest task of all was to identify them. Only when we understood the true nature of the problem, were we able to devise ways to make a change. This was surely a long and hard road, but we were aware that wishful thinking and self-congratulatory eulogies on “how good we are” were not going to help us.

The only possible way to overcome the standstill was to join the manpower and resources of all BH Medical Schools and to establish a critical mass to start the (r)evolution. Strong winds were blowing in our sails, manifested by good will and support of our European partners from Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Italy, Ireland, Germany, and Slovenia. However, assembling the five University Schools of Medicine in BH in early post-war period to work together on a curriculum reform was a mission close to impossible. The wounds had been still unhealed and prejudices and suspicions strong. Still, the academics from the Schools of Medicine exhibited a fair amount of common sense and decided to join the projects unanimously.

All five Schools of Medicine in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Sarajevo, Banja Luka, Tuzla, East Sarajevo, and Mostar) had much in common and were all under pressure to reorganize and improve the quality of their teaching, despite meager resources they had at their disposal. The financial support was provided through the Trans-European Program for Cooperation in Higher Education in Central and Eastern Europe (TEMPUS). The first project “Virtual Medical Library Development” (3-5) was granted in 1997, followed by the “Development of an Integrated Medical Curriculum” (Dictum) in 2003. Five more TEMPUS projects were approved and granted, in which medical schools from BH partnered with academic institutions from 9 EU countries.

#### **Authors' helpful editing policy of the *CMJ***

In the early phases of our collaboration, we were both satisfied with and proud of the accomplishments and results; still, our work was invisible to the larger academic community. The dissemination of our results was poor and communication with the international scientific community close to zero. Fortunately, these problems were solved in 2003, when the staff of the *CMJ*, led by its editors-in-chief, Professors Ana and Matko Marušić, offered professional support and assistance in publishing our results.

The breakthrough occurred in early 2004, when the *CMJ* kindly gave our team a chance to publish an editorial on curricular reform (6) and invited us to join the International Campaign for Revitalization of Academic Medicine (ICRAM) (7,8). Encouraged by these early achievements, we decided to start research work on curriculum reform, and the results exceeded all our expectations. We performed the internal and external quality assessment in all all five Medical Schools in BH, which was

one of the first national-level assessments of this kind worldwide (9).

In the years to follow, we performed a survey on students' attitudes and knowledge about science (10) and staff's attitudes on the curriculum reform (11). Treatises on medical education and reconstruction of the health sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina were published (12-14), as well as students' research (15,16).

The creation of the "Catalogue of Knowledge and Clinical Skills" was another demanding enterprise, lasting over a year. Thirteen medical schools (Vienna, Austria; Gent, Belgium; Aarhus, Denmark; Heidelberg, Germany; Split and Zagreb, Croatia; Chieti, Italy; Ljubljana, Slovenia and 5 schools from BH) from 8 European countries joined in these efforts. There were 16 co-editors and 120 experts, who covered all the fields of clinical medicine. When this project ended, the "Catalogue" was revised 22 times before printing. The *CMJ* editors and staff participated in all the phases of this project, finally publishing the Catalogue as the book from the *CMJ* Book Collection (17).

It should be said that at first publishing in prestigious world's journals seemed to us like a distant dream. This certainly would not have been possible if the editors and the whole editorial staff of the *CMJ* had not generously offered their assistance in planning our research, its implementation, data accumulation, and analysis, as well as in manuscript writing and communication with editors.

### Concluding notes

Finally, we would like to emphasize the unselfish character of the *CMJ*'s assistance; they have never asked for praise or prize. From what we could witness, the *CMJ* editors and the staff have fulfilled the promises stated in the Mission Statement and the "author-helpful pol-

icy." They encouraged and praised the work of medical teachers in Bosnia and Herzegovina, showed them new horizons that at first appeared out of reach, opened new perspectives, and facilitated dissemination of their work. The least we can do is to acknowledge this and express our deep gratitude. We also express the hope for a continuation and progress of the present editorial policy. Many members of the scientific community, not only in BH and Croatia, but in this region as a whole, depend on the support of the *CMJ*.

### Conflict of interest

VJ Šimunović is the regional editor of *CMJ* and loyal supporter of *CMJ* editors and their editorial policy.

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