PROPER MEDICAL WRITING FOR TARGETING GLOBALLY VISIBLE JOURNALS

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Introduction

I am currently Professor and Director of the Center for International Education and Research (CIER) at Tokyo Medical University (TMU) in Tokyo, Japan. TMU is a private medical university established in 1916, and located in Shinjuku, which is known as one of the busiest cities that does not sleep. We have 3 affiliated university hospitals and celebrated the opening of our newly built main hospital in 2019.

Over the years, there have been some changes at TMU in terms of internationalization. The number of non-Japanese patients has increased, and we are seeing more students who are interested in becoming globally competent doctors and researchers. Therefore, TMU is now more eager than ever to promote internationalization in both the hospital and university campus. This has led to the introduction of the International Medical Care Division in the hospital where patients can undergo examinations in various languages and receive high-quality medical care, in addition to more extensive education in the university, such as English for Medical Purposes (EMP) courses and nursing English courses in the undergraduate school, and lectures in medical writing and ethical publication in the graduate school. All such courses are taught by myself and the staff at CIER, and I believe that they create a foundation for fostering globally competent future doctors.

In addition to actual teaching, I am involved with international student exchange, which is another important role of CIER. Every year we accept medical students from abroad for clinical clerkships and send our own students in exchange, so I prepare such students for their clerkship through extensive English medical communication practice over a 3-month period.

Furthermore, we also try to promote collaboration with international researchers not only for undergraduate students but also for residents. Every year we see students with an interest in practicing medicine or pursuing research...
There are also a few undergraduate students who give presentations at conferences and even publish papers. Therefore, I think that any opportunity for international collaboration would certainly help to increase their motivation and create an international atmosphere.

We have also had the honor of welcoming some researchers from Kazakhstan in 2014 and 2015 who were introduced to us by Dr. Armen Gasparyan. We were able to discuss the difficulties of helping non-native English-speaking researchers with writing and publishing papers, which is another significant topic, as trying to increase the number of publications to international journals continues to be a challenge for TMU.

Outside the university, I serve as a Board member of the Japan Society for Medical English Education, which is the sole society for medical English education in Japan, member of the COI Committee of the Japanese Medical Association of Medical Sciences, as well as English language editor for several Japanese clinical society journals and the TMU Journal.

My career in medical writing

I began my career at TMU back in 1997 after graduating from university in the US. I started out as an assistant to my mentor, the late Professor J. Patrick Barron, who was one of the pioneers in introducing EMP education and medical editing in Japan in the early 1980s. He served as medical editor for numerous significant journals and societies and was recognized both domestically and internationally. Not only did he edit papers, but he also translated and edited many medical textbooks. However, despite his impeccable career and experiences, he never lost track of the most important function of editing and publishing, which is to contribute to the development of clinical practice to have a positive effect on the patients. He always talked about helping people and making a difference in the world. When I started my career, it was almost unimaginable to think that maybe a paper that you edit as an editor could make a notable difference in the world of medicine. However, as my career progressed, I find myself understanding the genuine value of his message and am truly grateful for all that he taught me.

Over the years, I have had the privilege of publishing in the Editing, Writing and Publishing section of the Journal of Korean Medical Science for which I have Dr. Gasparyan to thank. Dr. Gasparyan has continuously encouraged me to publish articles related to medical writing and publication ethics, to help non-native English-speaking researchers with the publication process. It is quite easy to forget that publishing in English is a very difficult task, especially for non-native English speakers. The articles published have been written by myself and my colleague Helena Fopiel, who acts as in-house editor at CIER. Together, we focus on significant issues and commonly seen mistakes based on our editing experiences, mainly among Japanese researchers.

Main issues with manuscripts written by non-native English-speaking authors

I feel that the differences in native language and the characteristics of that specific language can create problems when an author tries to switch to English mode and write. We find that cultural differences can affect how one writes when looking at papers written by Japanese authors. For instance, in Japan, one is not accustomed to clearly mentioning one’s achievements or strengths. This is because in Japan, it is better to be modest about one’s achievements, so this way of thinking is embedded in many different aspects of culture. How would this affect the way a Japanese researcher might write about their research? One example would be the common characteristic found in the Introduction and Discussion sections of a paper. We often come across very long and vague writing in these sections, which makes it unclear for the reader to understand the main objective of the research. Therefore, for Japanese authors, there is a need to practice writing clearly and precisely.

How non-native English-speaking authors may improve their academic writing skills

With the development of artificial intelligence (AI), there are many AI tools that can be used when writing papers. Of course, these will be very helpful for non-native English-speaking researchers, especially at the beginning of writing. However, I would like to stress the importance of familiarizing oneself with guidelines, such as the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors Recommendations, in other words the ‘global standards’ in medical writing. To prepare well-written papers, it is crucial that authors write with precision and clarity and adhere to guidelines. This means using correct wording and grammar, following the required format for papers, and being familiar with ethical standards and responsibilities. AI tools can correct grammar and create sentences in a matter of seconds but cannot take responsibility as an author. As ethical publishing is becoming increasingly stringent, especially with the availability of various AI tools, it is important that authors do not rely too heavily on AI tools, and always do a final careful check of the content.
In addition, I would suggest obtaining help from a professional medical editor. I am not aware of the commercial editing services available in countries other than Japan, but I think that it would make a big difference for non-native English-speaking researchers to utilize such services. I think that departments could include a budget for commercial editing (such is the case in Japan), as I believe it is a worthy investment. This would increase the quality of the researchers’ writing, which may lead to their papers being published in higher rank journals.

My thoughts on perspectives of Anti-Aging Eastern Europe as an English source for non-Anglophone readership

Despite the difficulties in publishing in English, I hope that Anti-Aging Eastern Europe will become a journal that connects researchers worldwide. I think that electronic journals can be an important medium for its readership to establish networks.

My message to authors, reviewers, and editors of Anti-Aging Eastern Europe

I had the opportunity to participate in some Webinars over the past few years, thanks to Dr. Gasparyan and Dr. Zimba. This experience has remained in my thoughts because I felt so much energy and passion among the participants to communicate, share knowledge, and exchange thoughts during a time of war and pandemic. I was so touched that I wrote about this experience in the Editor’s note section of the TMU university journal. I am very happy to be a part of such a wonderful group and hope that I can contribute in any small way.