

An unconventional career path for an oral pathologist: Sharing personal insights from experience as a part of medical publishing industry

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Abstract

Oral pathologists or dentists in general opting for alternate career paths are very common nowadays. Financial security, lesser availability of jobs and work satisfaction are the most commonly observed reasons for this openness to switch career. While there is a multitude of alternate career options available such as medical writing and pharmacovigilance in this review, we aim to give an insight specifically on opportunities available in the medical journals aspect of the publishing industry. Oral pathologists can opt to take this field as a full-time engagement and attain a constant growth in terms of finances, knowledge and personal development. One of the authors has opted for this career path and has provided personal opinions about the scope, opportunities and perks of working in this industry.

Keywords: Career, medical journals, medical publishing, oral pathologist

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INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, students completing postgraduation courses are open to choose an unconventional career path for themselves. The lower number of job opportunities in dental colleges and lesser pay band as compared to other fields could be one of the factors for openness to these alternative career paths.

The purpose of this review is not to demotivate budding oral pathologists from taking up traditional career paths of working in a college or having a private practice but to widen their horizons by giving them an insight into a

possible alternate career option where they could put their skills to good use.

WHY DO STUDENTS CHANGE THE CAREER?

Looking deeply into this matter, it has been observed that recently passed out dental students and even the ones who are studying dentistry or pursuing higher degree in dentistry are highly concerned for financial security, postgraduation studies, interest focus, work satisfaction, status in society and fulfillment of their desire to serve their nation and fellow beings once they attain their degree. All these are

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chief reasons which are provoking a student in this field to think about more future career pathways.^[1]

Furthermore, a master's degree in oral pathology is becoming less of interest, especially for male dentists not only because of scarce academic career opportunities as compared to other dental specialties but also lower income generation.^[1]

Lesser chances of getting academic roles have been attributed largely to massive increase in number of passed out oral pathologists in the last two decades in proportion to increase in job openings for this role in dental colleges. Even if one deliberates for further research options post Master's degree, there are not many organizations in India which can sponsor such projects. Moreover, without any other job in hand, self-funding option becomes almost impossible. Due to this prevailing situation and miserable plight, many oral pathologists are left with the choice to cast aside their specialty and enter a full-time dental practice which itself is financially challenging.^[2] According to a study conducted by Kaipa *et al.* on Indian dental practitioners, the job satisfaction levels were found to be only "medium" in practicing dentists.^[3]

Thus, looking for alternative career options has become a dire need for dental oral pathology specialists to survive in the current scenario.

WHAT ARE THE ALTERNATIVE OPPORTUNITIES?

Looking beyond the conventional paths of being an academician, one great option that has emerged recently for dental professionals which not many dentists are aware of is to make a shift toward the corporate world. One could choose to be a medical writer or be a medical editor in medical publishing industry. The industry gives you an option to either work for medical books or medical journals.

In this communication, our focus would be to discuss details regarding the "journals" sector. So far, we usually think that being a journal editor is a part-time job. However, in India, we do have some renowned publishing houses that offer a full-time opportunity to work for a journal. There is a myriad of roles available within the journals publishing field.

While the most common role we know of is that of the editor who takes a final call on a paper, there are other equally competent role profiles available. You could be a peer review coordinator where your role would involve selecting experts with the expertise on the topic of the

paper and requesting them to review the paper you have received in the journal.^[4] This role brings a lot of excitement as you get to read cutting edge-research even before it is published for other readers. This role provides you with an opportunity to interact and build contacts with top-notch researchers across the globe. It is thrilling to have an e-mail interaction with a lot of oral pathologists across the world.

Another role option you could opt for is that of a commissioning editor where you would be required to solicit content for your journal based on the journal scope. Apart from these there are teams on the "production" side where you could contribute by doing copy-editing, proof-reading etc. which makes the article ready for publication. There are also opportunities for being a portfolio manager where you will be needed to ensure smooth peer review and publishing of a group of journals allotted to you. Your focus would be to keep the turnaround time low and impact factors high. While you will start your journey/career most likely as an individual contributor in the team, slowly you can climb up the ladder and become a team manager with people reporting to you. With our own experience, we have witnessed a journey where one of us took the conventional path of joining as a senior lecturer in a dental college. However, after 2 years into the job, a move into the publishing industry was well embraced.

QUALIFICATIONS REQUIRED FOR ENTERING MEDICAL PUBLISHING INDUSTRY-FORTUNATE TO BE AN ORAL PATHOLOGIST

While any biomedical background is okay but having a master's, degree gives you a strong foundation for stepping into the academic/medical publishing. In our experience, master's degree in oral pathology is very helpful as a qualification because it instills the ability to do literature search and skills of analyzing the research-related data. The basic sciences subjects provide a grasp on basics of medicine field which helps to understand and evaluate papers which are not only dental but of medical subjects.

Someone with a degree in oral pathology is aptly trained to carry out research as one is sufficiently trained to do such projects in 3 years of postgraduation course. Furthermore, this branch is considered as embodiment of research work in dental field as one is frequently exposed to massive experience of understanding the pathogenesis of diseases of body as the mouth is considered the mirror of body and an oral pathologist is well trained to identify these signs and thus diagnose underlying systemic diseases as well. To add more to this, an oral pathologist goes through a systematic process of clinically looking at the disease

presentation, analysis of investigative procedures, looking under microscope to make the confirmatory and final diagnosis through clinicopathological correlation.^[5]

In depth understanding of overall normal and pathological mechanisms of the human body and research into innovative methods of early detection and diagnosis of various diseases such as malignancies, infections and inflammatory diseases whose first symptoms may appear in mouth makes it further a special and unique branch. Enormous development in the field of genetics, molecular insights, advanced diagnostic methods and their applications has further widened the horizon of scope of oral pathology.^[6]

All this knowledge and experience in 3 years of training during Masters in Oral Pathology make the candidate the most suitable person to carry out research. However, the sad thing is the minimal support for bearing finances to carry out such projects that act as a major obstacle in research in this field in our country. However, the skill acquired can never go waste if one knows the right direction to put it to its best use. Here comes the arena of medical writing and publishing field that offers multitude of not only career options but also work satisfaction and a dignified status to an Oral Pathologist in corporate sector as mentioned above.

HELPFUL SKILLS TO BECOME A PART OF JOURNALS PUBLISHING INDUSTRY

First, you need to have a basic liking for reading as the job includes sitting for long hours on your desk and reading the author's hard work with due patience and interest. Remember that the purpose of reading this research is to help the authors to improve it before publishing. Hence, always try to give an encouraging feedback to the authors. To be able to provide feedback clearly and concisely is the next skill which comes handy in this profession. Overall, the requirement is to have good written communication skills as you will be required to interact with national and international reviewers and authors.

To be able to review an article from an editor's perspective, it is helpful to be aware of different types of papers which can be published in a journal, e.g. original research, systematic review, case report, etc., and basic reporting guidelines for each type of paper. In simple words, a reporting guideline is a tool/checklist for health researchers to use while writing manuscripts. It emphasizes on a minimum list of information which should be included in a research article to enhance its reproducibility and scientific value. Overall,

there are around 470 types of reporting guidelines which are available for free access on "the EQUATOR network." The most used ones are CONSORT for clinical trials, STROBE for observational studies, ARRIVE for animal studies, PRISMA for systematic reviews and CHEERS for case studies.^[7] While it is practically impossible to remember each of these, it is always handy to refer to the website cited above and ensure that the authors have included a comprehensive description of their work. A basic knowledge about the above guidelines also proves extremely helpful to crack interviews for an in-house journal editor job in medical journals.

The need for understanding usage of various research databases such as PubMed, Science Direct and Cochrane cannot be emphasized enough. Most of the work of your job would be requiring the usage of these for finding latest and updated information on the topic so that you can give a fair judgment of whether the submitted research paper holds any novelty and significance for the readers.^[8,9] Most likely as an oral pathologist you would be familiar with most of these databases as you would have used them for working on your library dissertations and thesis.

As most of the publishing houses function in the structure of teams, it is good to have the skill set of being a team player. In the future as you progress in the hierarchy, you will need to adapt to the managerial responsibilities. Most organizations would provide you the training for this transformation from an individual contributor to a manager.

WHAT NEW DO I LEARN?

As you start working in journals publishing industry, your knowledge about the research work happening across the globe becomes updated because you read through several articles each day. In my experience, I observed that apart from dentistry-related topics, my grasp on other core medicine-related topics is slowly increasing. This is because even if I am only looking at the paper from an editor's eye, I am still reading the paper and trying to understand the content so that I can send it to a suitable expert for review. For the parts which I don't understand as I do not have a medical degree, I try to gain more knowledge through Google, reading e-books and articles.

Apart from this, I have learned new skills such as catching hold of fraudulent image manipulation by authors and usage of editorial management systems such as ScholarOne and editorial manager.^[10] Over time you also get to learn the nuts and bolts of corporate culture which gives a new dimension to your personality.

PERKS OF HAVING A CORPORATE CAREER IN MEDICAL PUBLISHING

The first and most important perk in my opinion is to have a stable monthly financial income which in most cases sadly is more than what we get from a job in a private dental college. This alternate career path can offer an oral pathologist a great work-life balance which might be a little difficult while maintaining a private practice where you need to work on weekends and adjust your work timings on the basis of availability of your patients. This career also provides you an opportunity to “work from home” full-time be it in pandemic or in normal situation. You even get flexibility to choose your working hours which is not feasible with a job in dental college or in a private practice.

The publishing houses sometimes even provide you with opportunities to attend conferences across the globe which helps them in bringing more business. In return, you get an international exposure by meeting different researchers and editors from your field.

WHERE TO LOOK FOR OPPORTUNITIES?

Fortunately, a lot of international medical publishers such as Taylor and Francis, Wiley, Springer, Elsevier, Thieme and many more have their set-ups in India. There are also many other Indian publishing houses such as JP publishing and Journal of clinical and diagnostic research who offer full-time opportunities to work in this industry. Keeping an eye on their official websites for vacancies and on job portals such as LinkedIn, Naukri and Indeed are helpful to know about recent opportunities. The authors are also willing to guide you based on the knowledge and experience they have gained in the industry. For any queries, you may contact as on the e-mail id provided for correspondence in this paper.

CONCLUSION

With this review, the authors wanted to bring your attention

to a lucrative alternate career option which could provide you a better work-life balance and financial stability. Of course, it purely depends on an individual’s personal choice and interest if they find this career suitable for them. We would again highlight that “Oral Pathology” is a great field to pursue as a career and the alternate career paths have been discussed here only to widen the horizons for our fellow “Oral pathologists.”

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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