Summary of Panel Discussion on Research and Publication

June 5, 2023

One of the stand-out features of this year's 2nd Global Health Conference were the concurrently running round-table style panel sessions. The panel on Research and Publication include the following esteemed panelists:

1. **Sabrina Bakeera-Kitaka, MD** (Makerere University, Uganda)
    - Senior Lecturer at the Department of Paediatrics and Child Health at the Makerere University, College of Health Sciences

2. **Syed Zahiruddin Quazi, MD, PhD** (DMIMS, India)
    - Associate Dean of Global Health and Director of Research and Development at Datta Meghe Institute of Medical Sciences (DMIMS) (DU), Sawangi Meghe, Wardha, India

3. **Abhay Gaidhane, MD, MBBS** (DMIMS, India)
    - Director, School of Epidemiology and Public Health and Professor of Community Medicine at Datta Meghe Institute of Medical Sciences (DMIMS) (DU)

4. **Marcos A. Núñez C, MD** (UNIBE; Dominican Republic)
    - President of the Pan-American Federation of Associations of Medical Schools

5. **Kaveh Khoshnood, PhD, MPH** (Yale University, CT, USA)
    - Dr. Khoshnood is an Associate Professor and Faculty Director for Humanitarian Research Lab at the Yale School of Public Health.

The first goal for the panel was to determine what barriers exist in establishing successful sustainable global health research programs. The following specific barriers were mentioned:

1. Capacity building – lack of capacity in middle- and low-income countries to conduct meaningful research;
2. Funding – either complete lack of or significant difficulties in obtaining for research projects;
3. Partners – it is not always easy to find partners who would be willing to collaborate on specific research projects;
4. Access to publications – subscription-based journals restrict access to full-text articles unless a fee is paid either in form of subscription to the journal, or one-time payment for access to a specific article.
5. Political aspects – conducting research in conflict zones can be challenging due to various political restrictions placed by governments.
6. Rapidly changing priorities in research was also mentioned as one additional barrier to sustainability of research endeavors along with lack of "staff continuity" (meaning a significant turnover of research staff).

The discussion then focused on the principles of issue of establishing and maintaining equitable and bi-directional partnerships in research. The following important items were outlined:

- The need for equal partnerships, regardless of where the funding for the research project is coming from.
- The importance of setting clear and very specific goals for the research project.
- Partners from higher income countries should be well aware of the needs of the local partners to address the needs of those communities.
- The research question that is being asked should be formulated by members of the community, in which the research project is being conducted, and not by those members of the team who are providing the funding.
- Strict ethics in publishing and authorship should be maintained to avoid favoring authors from higher income countries for senior authorship (first and/or last).
- The need for total transparency within the partnership to ensure viability of such a collaboration.

Next, the panelists and audience members of this round-table discussion raised the issue of challenges that clinicians face trying to participate in both clinical work and research activities. The challenges, among many others, are the following:

- Physicians are clinicians first and foremost and are typically not well trained in conducting high quality clinical research, and often experience difficulties in functioning as Primary Investigators (PIs).
    - PIs have to be aware and follow a multitude of rule and regulations for conducting clinical research, training in which requires time to be taken away from clinical care.
- In the Unites States, there is no requirements for residents to undergo training in the conduct of research, or to participate in a research project. The extent of research involvement of residents is typically limited to writing a case report or presenting at grand rounds/seminars. Thereby, research, simply put, is not part of the “fabric” of postgraduate clinical training in the US
- Several panelists and members of the audience noted that in other parts of the word research is a requirement during postgraduate clinical training.
- One of the ways to solve this issue is to have certain clinicians working on the so called “research track”, when part of their time would be protected from the need to provide clinical care, and that time would be dedicated to research investigations. However, it was the opinion of the majority of the discussants that while this may be possible in the US and in other high-income countries, in low- and middle-income countries a clinician’s income often depends on the clinical services that they provide.

The final topic that was proposed for discussion was related to publishing in international peer-reviewed journals and the challenges associated with this process:

- All of the members of the panel agreed that while the idea of having open access journal works well for providing unrestricted access to full texts of scientific papers, the flip side of the coin is the need to pay exorbitant article processing charges (APCs) when publishing your own work in an open access journal.
- Most investigators located in low- and middle-income countries (and even many working in high-income countries) do not have dedicated funds for publishing in open access journals and are required to pay the high APCs out of pocket.
- This model of paying for publishing in open access journals works best for researchers who are funding via large grant mechanisms (such as the NIH in the US), whereby publication charges can be made part of the budget. However, most of research activities conducted at partner institutions is not funded and is typically investigator-initiated.
- Another issue that was raised in regard to publishing in high-impact journals is related to difficulties that some authors f(rom non-English speaking countries) experience writing a manuscript in English language. Unfortunately, often studies with high quality content are rejected for publication in a high-impact journal due to low quality language presentation.
- Two specific suggestions were made during the discussion of how the Nuvance Health Global Health Academy can address these issues related to scientific publishing:
    - First, to establish a dedicated fund (portion of the budget) that would be used to help pay for APCs for accepted studies.
    - Second, to consider launching an online open access peer-reviewed journal in global health on the basis of the hugely popular eMagazine.

In summary, the panel discussion on Research and Publication resulted in a vibrant discussion and generated a lot of interest. The main outcomes of this session could be summarized in the following: the panelists and audience agreed that there is an urgent need to address the barriers that exist in conducted research in global health; these barriers should be addressed through establishment of equitable, bi- or multi-directional, sustainable partnerships between high- and low-/middle-income partner sites; efforts must be taken to ensure appropriate training in the conduct of research for clinicians and to provide protected time in the working schedule for research activities; finally, publishing in subscription-based and open access journals should be encouraged and partner sites should support each other in overcoming the various obstacles associated with publishing.