The Indian Journal of Medical Ethics: A Brief History of the First 25 Years
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The Indian Journal for Medical Ethics is the official publication of the Forum of Medical Ethics Society, Mumbai (FMES) and its beginnings are intimately linked to the formation of the FMES. In the early 1990s, a small group of physicians and health activists who used to meet regularly to discuss ethical issues in medical practice in India decided that firm action was necessary - rather than merely exchanging views and opinions - and subsequently formed the FMES. One of the early activities of the new Forum was a quarterly newsletter Medical Ethics, which started as a 12 page affair, but soon increased in size and by 1996, morphed from a newsletter into a journal named Issues in Medical Ethics. Towards the end of 2003, the title was changed again to Indian Journal of Medical Ethics, to better reflect its geographic origins.

The journal continues to be the official journal of the FMES, but clearly has its own sterling reputation now. In 2005, the journal was indexed on Medline/PubMed, beginning retroactively from 1993. In 2014, the journal was also included in the Philosopher's Index, which is one of the leading online bibliographic databases in philosophy. This has meant that IJME has more visibility now and has researchers actively seeking to submit manuscripts.

What has made the IJME successful? The odds (but not the gods!) were clearly against it. As predicted by the Newtonian law of inertia, the initial years were bound to be the hardest, but the later years have provided difficulties of a different, and often unexpected, nature. One of the challenges has been its financial viability. On policy grounded in ethics, the IJME editors steadfastly refuse to accept donations or advertisements from industry despite the severe lack of finances. The editorial board of the journal is also of the firm belief that research and knowledge must be offered free to all, which is why the journal went online a few years ago with free access to all its content. This meant that the journal was cannibalizing its own print circulation - and eating into its income. However, thanks to donations from philanthropic foundations and individuals, the journal has continued to be published. What has sustained the journal, often against seemingly unsurmountable odds, has been the absolute and unflinching commitment of those associated with it. The core group that initiated the journal is still closely guiding it.

Having established a successful journal, the core group of FMES/IJME has also started a series of well attended biennial National Bioethics Conferences (NBC). Even though named 'National', these conferences have a large international component and have come to be recognized as important events in the global bioethics calendar. Six conferences have so far been held at different cities and in collaboration with different local partners. These NBCs have dramatically increased the visibility of the journal as well as of Indian bioethics, both across India and the world, leading to better submissions.

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NBCs and the articles published in the IJME reflect the broad interpretation of 'medical ethics' by the editors, and the topics covered include ethical issues in medical finance, law, corruption in medicine, journalism, surrogacy, transplantation, history, the social sciences and politics.

Whereas the FMES/IJME originated primarily as a doctor-based group in a public hospital, other individuals from concerned groups have joined the think tank of the journal. There are now social scientists, philosophers, teachers, historians, medical ethicists, physicians, lawyers and health activists associated with the journal, either as editors or as contributors to the IJME and the NBCs. The differences in their training and thinking have enriched the journal and reflect the broad focus of bioethics in India.

REFERENCES: