

Enhancing sustainable research capacity through mentorship on research communication and through networking

D. Dissanayake^a, T. Thoradeniya^a, S. Jayasena^a, S. De Silva^a, R. Murugesan^b, B. Gastel^c, J. Walker^b and N. Karunaweera^a

^aFaculty of Medicine, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka; ^bInternational Network on the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP), Oxford OX1 1HU, UK, ^cTexas A&M University, College Station, Texas, USA; dilshani2003@yahoo.co.uk

Enhancing research writing skills is essential to improve the visibility of high quality research. Researchers in developing countries have limited access to locally relevant, locally led training on scientific writing and publishing. Training programmes organised by international organisations, can be expensive, one-off events and may involve local researchers only as recipients of training. To help address this situation, the Faculty of Medicine, Colombo, Sri Lanka, established the Research Promotion and Facilitation Centre (RPFC) through the World Bank funded “Higher Education for the 21st Century (HETC)” project, one aim of which is to enhance researchers’ writing skills. This abstract summarises the work carried out at RPFC, in collaboration with INASP to promote scientific writing skills via a sustainable programme.

RPFC, through funds received *via* a Memorandum of Understanding signed with INASP, has conducted 2 one-day scientific writing workshops in 2013 and 2014, a two-day train-the-trainers workshop on mentorship in scientific writing in 2015 and trained a young scientist from RPFC through an intensive research writing course at Texas A&M University, USA. INASP’s ongoing support to RPFC includes workshops in-person and Skype, providing resource material for workshops and writing clubs and guiding the installation of a virtual learning environment (VLE).

After training local academics, RPFC initiated a programme to enhance research writing skills in the faculty. As part of this, writing clubs were organised, one lasting for as long as four months, to mentor researchers (mentees) and to guide them throughout the scientific writing process (either a research proposal or a journal article). Mentors advise mentees on writing and research integrity during group and one-to-one meetings. Two writing clubs were completed in 2014 and 2015, and the third was initiated in March 2016. In addition, in 2015, RPFC’s VLE went live. In March 2016, our success story was shared with other health-related faculties in Sri Lanka during a two-day mentorship workshop, facilitated by an INASP expert. The main aim was to enhance research communication through networking. At the end of the workshop, participants devised plans with short- and long-term goals for their own faculties. Plans included collaborations between faculties, with RPFC being the central node.

The results of RPFC’s partnership with INASP indicate that a moderate amount of funding, a clear strategy, and committed professionals may be elements of a sustainable approach to building scientific writing skills. RPFC wishes to continuously support the enhancement of research writing skills of young scientists, with the ultimate aim of promoting high-quality research and a healthier research culture in Sri Lanka.