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Evaluation of Award Papers for National Conferences

We enjoyed the award paper session at the annual IAP Conference at Hyderabad which included five papers. However, as the results were declared beforehand there was hardly any excitement in audience. Also, the quality of platform presentation did not matter at all.

In my opinion, as is also generally felt, the evaluation of art of presentation is also necessary and as already commented(1), the weightage for this should not exceed more than 10%. Similarly some weightage (5-10%) should also be given to the replies given by the presenters to the questions asked by judges. In the award paper session, only the judges and not the audience, should be permitted to ask questions. Judges should keep the queries ready so

that there is no waste of time and quality of questions is good. At least 5 minutes should be devoted to question answer session after each paper. If some people feel that this may complicate the issue, then the weightage given to this point could be minimized to the extent of just 5%. This will maintain the interest of everyone till the end of the session. Top ranking three papers for each award (totalling 12 papers for 4 awards) should be selected for on the spot competition. They may be divided into 2 sessions of 6 papers each, taking 90 minutes for completion of each session. Assessment to the extent of 85% is done beforehand and 15% assessment is done on the spot so that excitement continues, assessment is fair and unhurried and platform presentation does matter.

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IAP Awards

I was interested to read Hegde and Vaidya's views on the IAP awards(1) and the editorial response(2) in the December issue of the Journal. Since I was instrumental in bringing about the changes in the award system (from "on-the-spot judging" to a peer review process), I may be allowed

to give some information and express my views.

You mention, "it is high time the Academy devotes some serious thought to this issue.....". In fact the Executive Board of the IAP had extensively debated and discussed this matter at a number of meetings over a period of three years. The Executive Board members also tried to obtain the views of their colleagues at different institutions. Eventually, after most careful considerations, a decision was taken to adopt the present rules. Appropriate guidelines were prepared, adopted by the Executive Board and finally approved at the general body meeting at Jodhpur at the 25th Annual Conference of the IAP.

Some of the merits of the present system are mentioned in your comment, and need not be repeated. Briefly, it was agreed that on-the-spot judging of diverse and complex investigative work was quite impossible. No judge could be expected to be an expert in all specialized areas (*e.g.*, immunorheumatology, nephrology, molecular genetics, cardiology) to adequately evaluate the merits of a paper within a few minutes. In actuality, the judging was heavily biased in favor of the presentation of the paper, with factors such as spoken English, poise and multicolored slides, becoming decisive. There were other drawbacks:

1. Since questions from the floor were not allowed, the presenter could make wrong statements and false claims which would go unchallenged.
2. The bulk of the work presented could have been carried out by senior co-authors. The first author merely presented the paper. Winning an award, of course brought credit to the Department and the Institution.
3. Instances when the work was done by

investigators whose contribution was not acknowledged were brought to notice.

The merit of scientific work is ultimately judged by its publication in a reputed journal. Most such journals subject all material to very careful, expert peer scrutiny. Whether such work did not win an award or was not considered for presentation at a certain meeting is totally irrelevant.

There can be little doubt that the present system of awards is much superior to the previous one. The "scaled structured research evaluation" proposed by you should further minimize the differences in assessment by various referees.

I firmly believe that the institution of different awards by the IAP, for "best presentation" at the conference was a mistake (a decision has been taken not to institute any more of such awards). Following their example various State and City branches of the IAP, also started their own awards and where several difficulties were further multiplied. The Delhi branch of IAP took a lead in changing their rules which are presently closer to those adopted by the IAP.

The present system of awards of course takes away the element of excitement and suspense of "on-the-spot judging"; such entertainment (recognized as such) can be provided by non-scientific or quassi-academic activities outside the conference hours.

A case could also be made for converting these awards into prestigious honors by the IAP for recognition of its members who have long years of contribution and achieved eminence in (i) research, (ii) education, (iii) community service, (iv) health organization, *etc.* Outstanding and promising young investigators could also be

recognized. Members of the IAP, could consider this proposal and write to the journal or to the President at the IAP. The IAP must not, however, revert to the old system of giving their awards.

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Evaluation of Award Papers for National Conferences

The article 'Evaluation of award papers for national conferences'(1) and comments thereon(2) were well timed and thought provoking. We agree that there is a need for developing a scaled structured system of evaluation to minimize the scope for subjective errors. However, we would like to put forward a few suggestions.

Firstly, all papers submitted for national awards should be scrutinized by an ethical committee. This committee shall decide the ethical righteousness of the study. Consequent upon the acceptance by the ethical committee, the paper goes to a panel of judges. Blindfolding of authors' and institution's name should be done. At the same time any mention of the name of the institution from the material and methods should also be deleted. Preferably,

a second panel of judges should also evaluate these studies objectively in order to minimize the inter-observer bias. Weightage of this second panel of judges should be less than that of first one. Experts from basic sciences including biostatistics should be involved to further upgrade the system of evaluation.

The proposed scaled structured research evaluation system should give more weightage to the initial design of the study (case selection, inclusion criteria, randomisation, selection of controls), hypothesis on which study is based and appropriate statistical analysis and its interpretation.

We endorse the view that some weightage (5-10%) be also given to the art of presentation. This will keep up the interest and competitive spirit alive as well as allow a comparison of the 2-3 top ranking papers in each category.

Finally, it is desired that before a new evaluation scale or system is put into operation, it should be presented to the Academy members and comments or criticism invited. This will help in early identification and timely rectification of lacunae, if any.

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