

Bhutan Health Journal : initiating a new era in Bhutan

Phurb Dorji¹

¹*Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, JDWNR Hospital, Thimphu, Bhutan*

The history of modern health care service in Bhutan dates back to as early as 1960s. From small humble shacks to traditional healing, the growth of health facilities and services has seen a tremendous leap to the present day tertiary hospitals with modern amenities. With time, the overall health status has improved and communicable diseases have declined. However, consequent to Bhutan's rapid socio-economic development and lifestyle changes, Non-Communicable Diseases (NCD) have emerged. Actually, NCDs have exhibited a successive rise over the years resulting to huge health expenditure in trying to contain them. Further, coupled with frequent infectious diseases outbreak and sustained low to moderate prevalence of communicable diseases, Bhutan bears the brunt of double burden of diseases. With changing epidemiology of disease pattern, time has come for Bhutan to adopt the evidence based practices to confront the changing demands of societies. The answer to this new phenomenon ultimately lies on promoting research and publications amongst the medical practitioners. Formulation of policies and programs for improving and sustaining the health care system are best based on evidences generated through research. The good news is that researches pertaining to health and people's wellbeing have been already going on in the country. To have proper Institutional Review Board (IRB) for human subject protection, the Ministry of Health, Royal Government of Bhutan has established the Research Ethics Board of Health (REBH) in 2009 with the help of The Forum for Ethical Review Committees in the Asian and Western Pacific Region (FERCAP) and Armed Forces Research Institute of Medical Sciences (AFRIMS) based in Bangkok. All

those conducting any health related research/study in Bhutan involving human subjects are required to get prior approval from the REBH. At present, the REBH is recognized by the FERCAP

and Office for Human Research Protections⁴ (OHRP) in USA through the Federalwide Assurance (FWA). After establishing the REBH, we felt the need to have a scientific journal in the country to share the knowledge in the medical fraternity. In 2010, the health research unit of the Ministry of Health did try to launch a research based publication but without success. While all efforts to publish a medical journal seemed to go down the drains, there appeared a ray of hope with the establishment of Khesar Gyalpo University of Medical Sciences of Bhutan in 2012. Three years on, hope turned into reality. In May 2015, the Bhutan Health Journal (BHJ) was launched as an official scientific publication of Khesar Gyalpo University of Medical Sciences of Bhutan. Bhutan Health Journal is an international peer reviewed journal that covers a wide range of areas such as clinical, para-clinical, medical education, nursing and midwifery, traditional medicine, public health, health policy, planning and financing, hospital and health care management, research, publication ethics as well as perspectives from various fields of health sciences envisioned to bring improvement to health care service in Bhutan. BHJ is envisaged to become a journal of excellence which focuses on health care and well-being of the Bhutanese people. This opens up a plethora of opportunities for effective media that would foster exchange of ideas, transfer of knowledge and technology, and promote cooperation in the field of research not just in Bhutan, but also in the region and the global scientific community.

Corresponding author:

Phurb Dorji

phurbd@gmail.com