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Publishing negative results – sometimes it is more important!

We all like to be successful; we all like to present our success and to be proud of it. Publishing our success gives a good name to our lab, to our practice, to our department, but what if things do not go as expected? What if the data we have collected do not behave as we wished or anticipated? What if we get no beneficial influence of a promising product, or negative results from performing a certain procedure in our clinical work?

Sometimes, publishing those results is even more important than just being proud of our success. When we encounter negative results we can assume that our colleagues around the world will get similar outcomes for the same procedures. Publishing our findings in a timely manner might help those colleagues avoid the mistakes we have made or keep away from unpredictable treatments. This is in line with our primary oath of *Primum non nocere* (“first, do no harm”) and might prevent suffering and complications for other patients around the globe. Hiding or being ashamed of negative results will leave only the positive reports to be published and will create a very biased overall picture. Indeed, looking at the literature, there are far more reports on success and positive outcomes than on complications, failures, and negative outcomes.

In the current era, when financial bias is also a problem, the importance of reporting negative results is even greater. Consider a new product that is being promoted by the industry. It could be assumed that the supported research will highlight the successful results. If we experience different results and fail to report them promptly, we might miss the opportunity to help our peers and their patients to avoid or modify the use of such a product.

The same is true of novel techniques. The fact that we have faced some concerning results with a specific technique doesn't mean that we are a failure! It means, usually, that this technique is not as successful as previously perceived or published, and this is important information that needs reporting.

Negative results, including unsuccessful cases, complications, and failures, should be encouraged for publication by journal editors. It will benefit us all to share not only the good but also the bad experiences we have. Let's all learn from our mistakes and failures – it's not a shame, it is good clinical practice.

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