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Article *in* Hepatitis Monthly · March 2012

DOI: 10.5812/hepatmon.841

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Scientific Apartheid

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ARTICLE INFO

Article type:
Editorial

Article history:
Received: 04 Feb 2012
Revised: 09 Feb 2012
Accepted: 14 Feb 2012

Keywords:
Iran
Science
Sanctions

► *Implication for health policy/practice/research/medical education:*

Recent sanctions imposed by some international publishers against secular publications from Iran might ultimately deprive human society of access to results of research projects performed by Iranian scientists. However, it seems that Iranian scientists should find innovative ways in order to disseminate the results of their research projects globally.

► *Please cite this paper as:*

Cheraghali AM, Scientific Apartheid. *Hepat Mon.* 2012;12(3):158-9. DOI: 10.5812/hepatmon.841

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Production of knowledge in recent decades has exploded at an unbelievably fast pace, resulting in the vast progress of science in recent years. Generation of data and knowledge are occurring so quickly that processing and managing that knowledge has become problematic in many societies. Although much of this knowledge and data might never be converted into applicable technology, recent scientific progress has caused astonishing change and improvement in human life. There is a general consensus that scientific progress could be considered an important indicator to measure societies' development. Although each country might have a different share in the advancement of knowledge, to some extent, all nations have contributed to the impoverishment of knowledge as a heritage of humankind. In 1979, Iran, one of the most populated countries in the Middle East, witnessed a historical change in its political system, from kingdom to Islamic republic. This change and the subsequent eight-year-long war Iraq imposed on the country crippled educational and academic activities in Iran; However, in the late 1980s, educational and scientific activities increased immensely in the country. In the past two decades, the government of Iran has al-

located substantial human and financial resources for research and education. This has drastically increased the number of papers published by Iranian scientists, in both local and international reputable journals in all fields of science. Although some parts of these publications lack novelty or innovation and might remain uncited by researchers in other countries (1), many of these papers identify results from research projects focused on the country's specific problems. As a result of the Iranian government's investment, scientific output in 2010 grew 11 times faster than the world average. In 2011, Iranian scientists published more than 17,598 papers in reputable international journals, a 20% increase compared to 2010. In fact, this percent of increase is the highest in the world (2, 3). Despite three decades of political conflict between Iran and some other countries, until recently, Iran's scientific society was not directly targeted by this conflict. However, recent movements against Iran's scientific society indicate that, despite obligatory commitment of international institutions to global science, some of these organizations have reacted hostilely toward knowledge produced by Iranian scientists. Although previous reports of misconduct from international institutions regarding the Iranian scientific community were based on non-scientific and incongruous accounts, it seems that this type of pressure is increasing among some international institutions. In 2007, an international organization known for its support for blood safety for pa-

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tients declined to support a scientific gathering in Iran on account of the “lack of democracy” in the country (4). Fortunately, many other scientists worldwide condemned this behavior. However, similar behaviors have been repeated by other organizations that allege global commitment to the human sciences. Recently, one of colleagues shared with me a reply he received concerning the submission of his manuscript. He had submitted his manuscript for evaluation to a journal published by “Dove Medical Press Ltd”. The publisher of the journal is replied to him as follows: “I personally greatly regret that I am placed in a situation where I have no choice but to reject your paper along with all of those sent to us by Iranian authors. I do not make this decision lightly and have consulted with the authorities both here in New Zealand and in the United Kingdom before making my decision.” Although this response was quite unbelievable and shocking, I believe sharing this mistreatment of science produced by Iranian scientists might prevent it from happening again. Obviously all international journals have the mandate to disseminate to the world science and knowledge produced by researchers, regardless of race, religion, or political standing of the home countries of the authors. Therefore, this behavior by “Dove Medical Press Ltd” could be considered a new barrier for the advancement of human knowledge. For Iranian scientific society, this sort of mistreatment can only be considered a hostile encounter employed to slow their scientific progress and presence in the global scientific community. Unfortunately, Iran’s scientific society has also recently faced terrorist activities. Over the past two years, several Iranian scientists on their way to their homes or universities have been assassinated by terrorists. I do not suggest that the act of publishers refusing to consider manuscripts submitted for publication by Iranian scientists is in line with terrorist acts of assassination. However, both actions might, in fact, lead to the same goal—that is, to deprive Iran and other nations of access to results of research conducted by Iranian scientists. As Robert Byer, president of the American Physical Society, mentioned in his letter condemning the assassinations of Iranian scientists, “Science belongs to human-

ity, transcending boundaries and enriching the lives of people regardless of race, nationality or belief system” (5). Therefore, any restrictions on the worldwide dissemination of science not only prevent advances in the scientific enterprise, but also close venues for peaceful cooperation and understanding among scientists.

I am sure that these futile and counterproductive actions will not stop Iranian scientists from their contribution to the advancement of human knowledge and science; instead, they might only create scientific apartheid against scientists living in countries such as Iran. Attitudes such as those of Dove Medical Press Ltd are humiliating to academics and scholars who work hard to contribute to the science, health, and well-being of humankind. I hope this letter will ignite further debate among readers of *Hepatitis Monthly* and others to prevent such acts against humanity. These acts ultimately will result in apartheid against scientists who are living in countries that might have political conflicts with countries known as superpowers.

Author’s Contribution

The manuscript has been prepared by AM. Cheraghali.

Financial Disclosure

None declared.

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