EDITOR'S PAGE

Use the Ingredients That Are in Season

As I completed my 2-month sabbatical in academic medical centers of South Africa I began to reflect on what a marvelously stimulating experience it had been. The opportunity to travel and see what others do is rewarding, but the chance to actually work together with them over an extended period in environments different from one’s own is exceptional. In addition to the academic medical centers in which I worked, there were 2 cardiology meetings that took place during my visit: the South African Heart Association meeting in East London and a biannual meeting of the South African and French physicians in Cape Town. In all of these situations one of the more common questions I was asked by the younger physicians was, “How do I get published in a leading medical journal?” This question was explored extensively by Tony DeMaria with input from the JACC associate editors, and I recommend this article to all potential authors (1, 2). I will not recount all the recommendations but the ingredients that are emphasized are that the paper should have novelty, accuracy, and importance. In other words, “new, true, and relevant,” and the closer the paper comes to meeting these requirements, the more interesting it will be to the editors and subsequently to the readers. However, there is another overriding concept in the recommendations; i.e., a well-designed project is the essential ingredient leading to a publishable manuscript. As I have given this talk on how to write publishable papers many times, I wonder if I am saying anything meaningful about the well-planned project. Where does the hypothesis leading to the study design come from? What is the appropriate question to be asked by the young investigator?

On my last night in South Africa, I was invited to dinner at the home of the son of Bernard Gersh. The modern hillside house, reminiscent of a Frank Lloyd Wright design, was a perfect setting for conversation with the lights of Cape Town extending below to the sea. The group was intimate with Bernard, Gilles Montalescot and his wife, and me enjoying a braai (South African for “barbeque”) of lamb and some excellent South African wines served by Jonathan Gersh. Jonathan is in the business of agricultural export so the conversation naturally turned to food. I was surprised to learn that France is not a good market for South African produce. Other northern European countries certainly are. The explanation came from Gilles. The French like to prepare what is in season. The French go to the market not with a shopping list to buy the ingredients for a pre-conceived meal, but often to see what is in season at the market and from that the meal evolves. What is in season, of course, relates to temporal as well as spatial considerations (time and place). He said that the French often taste the produce to be assured that it will be delicious. My wife, who usually does the shopping, would perhaps be arrested for similar activities at a normal grocery store. In any case, I am very attracted to this idea of using the ingredients that are local and in season despite the fast food epidemic.

You are beginning to wonder what this has to do with clinical research and the papers that emanate from that work. Well, maybe the young investigator has a mentor with a project that is well planned, and all he has to do to be listed on the paper (or partial credit for the meal) is to “toss the salad.” On the other hand, the hypothesis that is novel may arise from looking in the market for the ingredients that are in season. Some research questions are very pertinent because their time has come, although they may have been irrelevant in the past because technology did not exist to study them and they may be equally irrelevant somewhere in the future because the question has been answered or is no longer important. Perhaps we should study them when they are in season. The unique opportunity to use local ingredients also
provides opportunity. Dr. Mpiko Ntsekhe, from Cape Town, is directing a pan-African study of tuberculous pericarditis that may give important insights into the most effective therapies. This study has found its time and place. It would not be carried out in Japan. Also in season, unfortunately, is the epidemic of cardiovascular disease among South Africans of Indian origin. Dr. Sajadah Khan of Durban is studying the genomic associations among different racial groups living in a similar environment. As there is an explosion of metabolic syndrome and diabetes in all groups, this research is of great interest at this time.

Yes, writing a publishable paper does require paying attention to the preparation, but critically hangs on the novelty, accuracy, and importance of the project itself. Important questions should generate hypotheses that when applied to time and place should generate answers that are new, true, and relevant. Prepare the meal (and the study) with ingredients that are in season.

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