

Being an Associate Professor

Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

I would like to share the contradictions I experienced both while preparing the file assessment reports and oral exams for the associate professor examination and my search for objects act through your journal, which is the media organ of the Turkish Society of Otolaryngology and Head and Neck Surgery that represents our branch.

I am of the opinion that the method and way of application in the process of promotion to associate professorship do not benefit either our scientific field or the people preparing for academic life. On the contrary, they are harmful to scientific principles and ethical values. It seems that the problems experienced are common in all scientific branches (1). It is difficult to take other countries' systems as a model since many developed countries use a competitive open staff system instead of our proficiency exam system. In this system, methods such as the application of more than one candidate for one position, conducting gradual interviews (commission, senior professors, and department) and non-parametric (poor, medium, good, excellent) scoring of the file (2).

The method applied in our country is based on file assessment and oral examination by an independent commission, and open positions are not sought. Legislative regulation is necessary for changing the oral examination which has subjective features. It would be right to focus on the part of the file assessment in this paper, for which we can make a difference in the short term by just changing our behavior.

The assessment of the file of one candidate is conducted by the "portfolio evaluation" of Assessment and Evaluation. Portfolios are files consisting of selected studies indicating the performance of the individual in his area of speciality and showing his personal development in time (3). The aims and criteria of portfolio evaluation are clear (4).

Two features have to be defined for portfolio evaluation: minimum necessities and development through time. The minimum necessities defined by the Council of Higher Education are far from meeting the purpose of training high quality associate professors. The criteria identified by each university for their positions do not affect getting the title of Associate Professor.

A clear definition is necessary for determining the qualities of anything. The title of Associate Professor has been defined legally in the Law numbered 2547. In article 22 of this law, the following duties are required to be performed by an Associate Professor briefly:

1. Teaching
2. Conducting applied studies
3. Managing project preparations and seminars
4. Conducting scientific research and writing articles
5. Supervising

The files defining the features for carrying out these duties should have 3 different parts:

A. Documents showing competence

These documents are evidence of qualities of individual. It is not possible to measure any of these features with a subjective examination. Questioning of competence regarding education and research and its documentation are present almost in all promotional instructions. Many documents are requested such as the lectures given, lecture notes prepared, studies in question commissions, feedback of students educated and reference letters (5). The documents indicating a minimum background for education and research in our country are as follows:

a. Turkish Otorhinolaryngology and Head and Neck Surgery Certificate of Board: This certificate is given through examination, and the mark attained is an objective indicator of a person's education level.



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b. Certificate of Use of Experiment Animals: The studies regarding the establishment of experiment animals ethics committees and regulation of these studies started in 2006.

c. Certificate of Good Clinical Practices: This is an ethical and scientific quality standard about designing, carrying out, recording and reporting of clinical research to be conducted on humans. Currently it is only compulsory in drug and device studies.

d. Certificate of Basic Research Techniques and Assessment and Evaluation: This title involves the basic education subjects of all graduate programs. Hypothesizing, selection of sample, and application of assessment methods that are suitable for the subject are important for research studies to be healthy. A thesis advisor must have this information.

e. Certificate of Training for Trainers: This certificate is given generally by the Department of Medical Education. It consists of the characteristics of adult training and different education techniques, and is necessary to provide education for undergraduate and graduate programs. Some faculties of medicine in our country make this certificate compulsory for all faculty members.

All of these certificates are given at the end of short courses, and distance education options exist for all of them.

B. Papers and Congress Handouts

In our country there is a prejudice that publishing many papers is a guarantee of providing competence. There is no practical use in determining the minimum requirement in the competitive systems used in countries we make comparison, since making comparison among the present candidates or no appointment if there is no candidate having the desired qualifications are in the institution's authority. However, minimum criteria are required with respect to ensuring objectivity in the barrier system. In this stage, quality rather than quantity should be assessed. In a study conducted in German universities, it was reported that 51% of medical faculties identified publication performance in detail, the number of minimum requested papers was 8 +/- 3 and the number of being first author was 6 +/- 1 (6). What is expected from the papers and reports is to prove whether a person can conduct necessary studies in their research area and if they can manage a thesis or not. It is also important to observe their knowledge about different methods while determining the minimum number. They should be expected to have a command of the hierarchy of research methods with respect to the quality of results obtained (7). Moreover, in addition to the number of papers, criteria of national or international recognition (reference) should also be requested (8). When only publications are considered, the first author publications in the file with following qualifications should be recommended.

- Experimental Animal Study (1) (Science Citation Index-Expanded (SCI-Exp))
- Prospective clinical study (2) (SCI-Exp)
- Prospective basic scientific study (1) (SCI-Exp)
- Retrospective clinical study (1) (SCI-Exp)
- Prospective clinical study (1) (SCI-Exp)(Turkish journals entering into international indexes)
- Retrospective clinical study (2) (Turkish journals entering into international indexes)
- Case report (2) (Turkish journals entering into international indexes)
- Review (1) (Turkish journals entering into international indexes)

It is not possible to evaluate the scientific quality of reports if they are not published as full text. It was reported that 54% of German

faculties did not allow this area in their criteria (6). This area should be evaluated as an indicator of continuous and active participation to congresses. It may be recommended that irrespective of qualitative characteristics, at least four oral reports should be presented in international congresses (World, and European and Mediterranean countries) and eight oral reports should be presented at national congresses provided that all are first authors and two of them are not presented at the same congress.

C. Experience and Activities

In this section the steps leading the candidate in his academic life to the title of Associate Professor should be exhibited. There are universities that identify these criteria in detail, indicating development in academic and occupational areas, professional organizations and in the social sphere (5). The following criteria can be evaluated in the conditions of our country:

- Experience in another clinic (Experience of at least 3 months abroad or in a different training clinic).
- Lecturing experience at the undergraduate level (Proof of education experience is as important as research experience in international criteria. At present it is not necessary to work at a university to gain this experience).
- Printed or online individual lecture notes.
- Project [University research fund, TUBITAK (Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey), private institution, etc.].
- Membership to national and international institutions and responsibilities.

I am of the opinion that it would be right for our community, who developed the Board System of Turkish Otorhinolaryngology and Head and Neck Surgery for determination of the standards of Otorhinolaryngology Speciality, to develop a certain standard for associate professorship as well. I hope that my considerations will start a discussion in associate professorship and be guiding for the young in the beginning of their academic carriers. I wish to transfer the duties we carry out at present to our students who are better educated than us.

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