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EDITORIAL

Impact factor; its importance for authors and medical journals



El factor de impacto; su importancia para los autores y las revistas médicas

The medic in our environment has been, traditionally, trained to perform clinical activities, meaning, to take care of health and fight disease. In the face of all the changes occurred to medicine, it becomes more and more frequent the necessity to incur in the practice of teaching and medical investigation, given that otherwise the possibility to participate in a competitive environment is reduced and the opportunity of professional growth diminishes. This is not a new concept, in fact, doctor Ruy Pérez Tamayo has pointed out that the truly ethic medic "must perform, as far as possible, the three following functions: 1) to take care of health and fight disease, always promoting an optimal medic-patient relation; 2) to teach his knowledge to students, colleges, patients, familiars and all those who could benefit with it, and 3) to contribute to the augmentation of knowledge through medical investigation." In relation to this last point, the most common and simple way to culminate medical investigations is the publication of their results in a medical journal. Medical Mexican journals began to publish in 1772-1773 with the creation of the newspaper *Mercurio Volante*; in 1864 the *Gaceta Médica de México* was published. Despite the fact that the history of medical journals in Mexico goes back to more than three centuries, some Mexican researchers have said that the scientific information published in Mexican journals is, generally speaking, of bad quality. Assertion that researchers don't share, such as Guillermo J. Ruiz-Argüelles, who fundaments it in a revision performed during the year 2000 in two national journals of monthly appearance, it revised 99 original works of medical investigation. Concluding that it is possible to suggest that the average scientific quality of Mexican biomedical investigations published in the two national journals with the greatest impact factor in the year 2000 was reasonably good, which contrasts with the occasionally expressed opinion in relation to the bad quality of publications in national journals. However, this is not reflected on the impact factor of Mexican journals. It is frequently postulated that the best investigation works, not only in Mexico but also in

Latin America, are generally published in foreign journals given that Mexican journals have a low impact factor, thus conditioning the lack of original works publications of high quality that are potentially susceptible to be cited on other international journals. The impact factor is determined by the Institute of Scientific Information (ISI – currently called Thomson ISI), it gives access to information related to quality scientific investigation and covers journals in different areas related to science. It corresponds to the number of citations obtained by the journal in a year, divided by the number of manuscripts published on the two previous years. In an analysis published by Tellez-Zenteno, it was reported that on 2004 the four countries of Latin America with more than one journal on the Thomson ISI, were Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Mexico. The other Latin-American countries had none or just one journal in the data base Thomson ISI. Argentina had 5 registered journals, with impact factors of 0.06 to 0.70; two bilingual journals, two redacted in Spanish and one in English. Chile had 8 registered journals with impact factors of 0.10 to 2.1; three written in English, two in Spanish and three bilingual. Brazil had 16 registered journals, with impact factors between 0.09 and 1.1; six written in English, eight bilingual and two in Portuguese. Mexico had 8 registered journals with impact factor between 0.22 and 3.2; one of them in English, one in Spanish and the other six bilingual. The percentage of journals written in English or in combination with the national language, on the four countries was greater than 60%. The three journals with the greatest impact factor were written in English. The language in which an article is published is not only a situation that affects Mexican journals and it is not only related with the impact factor, but it also affects the diffusion of investigation articles. It is undeniable that in the last decades, in the international space, English language has been adopted as the most common used for diffusion of scientific knowledge and in parallel, the international diffusion of written information in other languages has diminished. When an article is not published in English, unjust and aberrant situations can

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take place. An example is the one cited by Macias-Hernández in a Mexican journal; the author published a series of 10 cases of systematic infection by *aeromonas* in Mexico in the year 1988. In 1993 Kelly and cols describe the biggest series published to that year, with 56 cases, in which the article published by Macias-Hernandez was not cited. Ironically, Kelly described that the clinical spectre in tropical countries was unknown, despite that Macias-Hernández had reported that the cases that he published showed a different clinical presentation. The absence of knowledge of this article and many more probably is not due to the lack of diffusion, given that the abstract appear in international indexes, but probably because of the publication language. An example of a Mexican journal that increased its impact factor by converting to English is *Archives of Medical Research*. It is clear that the impact factor, by itself, does not represent the quality of the published articles in the journal and can be considered an unfair measure for many countries, and it can even be considered that its purpose is to promote and sell more a journal with higher impact, arguing that it is of better quality. The reality must be accepted, it is a measure accepted internationally that we must take into account more every day, to promote Mexican and foreign authors to publish in Mexican journals. However, there are other factors to consider that demotivate authors to publish in

Mexican journals, Raúl Cicero-Sabido points many of them, amongst which there is: fear of not being cited by the same Mexican authors, the so called Mateo effect; because on the pairs revision they can be rejected with no explanation; the possibility of being judged by incompetent reviewers emitting mistaken opinions or out of the manuscripts context; of having to wait a long time to obtain a favourable or negative contestation. It is indispensable to offer, principally, Mexican authors spaces to publish their investigations and to contribute to the development of science and to increase the knowledge through medical investigation. The publication of a journal that results attractive for the authors is not only an act of good will, but it also requires to establish an editorial politic that takes into account all the aspects that prevent competitiveness and understand that the context changes permanently, which implies adaptation to transcend through time.

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