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EDITORIAL

The Editorial Challenges Faced by International Medical Journals in Latin America

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Over the half past century, the leading causes of morbidity and premature death in countries of Latin America (LA) have gradually shifted from the transmissible diseases caused by distinct infectious agents towards the noncommunicable chronic diseases (NCDs). These illnesses account for 71% of premature deaths globally.[1] However, a very high rate of NCDs occurs among the low and middle-income regions of the Americas.[1,2] In regards to liver diseases, parasitic infections caused by amoeba or *Fasciola hepatica* have importantly diminished. At current, the obesity epidemic which has extended dramatically in LA as in other regions of the world, has triggered the incidence of metabolic risk factors that are known to have an impact on the liver, such as non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD). Furthermore, the "Elimination of Viral Hepatitis by the year 2030" campaign[3] is a global initiative in which the high-income countries could have better feasibility to fulfill out the strategies, yet its implementation in LA remains unclear.[4] Reasons are partly the underestimation of these health problems by the governmental agencies and the lack of political commitment. On the other hand, more evidence-based literature is required to combat hepatitis viruses in LA starting with an update on the molecular epidemiology of hepatitis viruses A-E or even investigating the efficacy of conventional and new HCV direct-acting antiviral drugs among the admixed populations of this region.[5] Furthermore, alcoholic liver disease whether acute or chronic is still far from becoming unimportant in the near future.

Concomitantly to this epidemiological situation, a transformation of the physician profile has occurred and accordingly, medical training and academic health centers have evolved.[6] In the past, physicians (MDs) focused mainly on assistance and teaching; however, currently, they are acquiring a more comprehensive education dedicated to patient care, teaching, and research. Conjunctly, the MD., Ph.Ds. and other doctorates in the field of health sciences are making significant contributions to enrich further the knowledge of medicine. These new human resources are now not only learning universal knowledge but also generating new data by research to solve the health problems at the country level. Unfortunately, this educational transformation in the field of medicine has not occurred uniformly across the globe, in which the emerging countries such as those of LA, may fall behind almost 30 years or more in these requirements. For example, there is a need for creating more training programs integrating basic and clinical aspects for hepatologists in LA. On the other hand, research needs funding and grants are usually approved based on their quality, impact on the current knowledge and how they contribute to solving health problems. Therefore, quality needs to be evaluated.

Throughout the years, the evaluation of medical-scientific productivity has been done by using qualitative and quantitative parameters. The qualitative aspects consider human-capital formation, creating clinical, medical and scientific infrastructure and the recognition of the health professional by the scientific and medical community. On the other hand, research was first evaluated by the quality of the publications which are estimated by the prestige of the journal. Later on, such influence was defined by the impact factor, although it was noted that not all scientific papers that were published in a high impact factor journal had the same amount of citations at the international level.

Recently, Professor J.E. Hirsh proposed the Hirsh-index (*h*-index) as an alternative measure between the quantitative and qualitative aspects of scientific productivity.[7] The *h*-index is the minimum number of citations equivalent to the same amount of scientific articles, v.gr. an *h*-index of 5 means that the author has five citations in at least five publications, even though he/she may have in total a

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higher number of papers or a high number of citations. A researcher with an *h*-index of 20 is considered successful whereas an individual with more than 30 is outstanding. On the other hand, Google Scholar besides the *h*-index uses the h_{10}-index to highlight the number of the author's articles that have reached at least ten citations. These indexes or any other that is chosen will drive the emerging medical and scientific societies to be more transparent in regards to the impact of their publications at both the regional and international level. Consequently, different academic institutions, such as universities, research centers, medical or scientific academies are using them as a requirement for membership. In LA, Brazil considers the *h*-index to admit new members to the National Academy of Science; Mexico grades the contributions of the scientific community using the National System of Researchers, whereas the medical societies or associations do not evaluate the professional proficiency of their membership.[8] This limitation needs to be tackled by the medical associations to improve the quality of their members since they are the ones responsible for the advancement of science and the generation of knowledge. The knowledge that is needed to solve the top health problems whether they are continental, within countries or specific regions. Furthermore, the dynamic and progressive trends in innovative publication platforms of knowledge are moving forward; thus, new data is shared promptly and efficiently. Although, despite these editorial advancements, paradoxically, the new knowledge generated in LA or other emerging countries do not always gain interest in the country of origin and they also may not have acceptance in the prominent international journals.[9] Nonetheless, it is notable that *Annals of Hepatology* is a Latin American journal that serves as the Official Journal of the distinguishable medical organizations: CASL, AMH, and ALEH with a prominent membership dedicated to the study of the liver in the American continent, and coincidently ALEH is proudly celebrating its 50th anniversary.[10,11] Therefore, our primary challenge will be to provide efficient editorial support to authors that contribute not only to the universal medical knowledge but mostly its usefulness in solving region health problems that we may have in common or specifically by region. To start in the right direction, our first objective is to increase the impact factor of *Annals of Hepatology*. Therefore, the next challenge will be doing more effort and teamwork to position the journal at the international level by increasing not only our worldwide authorship but also incrementing good-quality publications from LA, including those received from the members of our partner institutions. In other words, a journal's impact factor increases as its membership grows academically and scientifically stronger.[12]

Since the foundation of *Annals of Hepatology*, many colleagues have participated as editors and collaborators. To all of them, we extend our appreciation for their valuable contributions, time and effort for leading Annals of Hepatology to this new stage. Now, a renovated Editorial Board will support this continuous challenge to strengthen *Annals of Hepatology* with contributions related to the mainstream and emerging topics within the new aim and scope. This accumulated world-class expertise reunited will undoubtedly impel *Annals of Hepatology* to a higher level of impact by increasing the h-index of each submitted paper. Most importantly, *Annals of Hepatology* will publish clinical practice guidelines, consensus, position statements or thematic workshop materials generated by LA expert panels or network committees of our academic partners. Additionally, *News*, *Milestones of Hepatology and Education and Training in Hepatology* are sections created for contributors interested in publishing notes or articles that emerge from the day-by-day activities of our societies, memories of our mentors and mentoring our students that have impact in teaching, clinical care and research in the field of Hepatology.

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