

A Vibrant Community of Readers, Authors and Reviewers: A Medical Editors' Necessity and a Challenge for Medical Education



Uma Comunidade Vibrante de Leitores, Autores e Revisores: Uma Necessidade dos Editores Médicos e um Desafio para a Educação Médica

Pedro ESCADA¹, Helena DONATO¹, Tiago VILLANUEVA²
Acta Med Port 2019 Mar;32(3):171-172 • <https://doi.org/10.20344/amp.12020>

Keywords: Periodicals as Topic; Portugal; Publishing

Palavras-chave: Portugal; Publicação; Revistas

The goal of medical publishing is to disseminate scientific knowledge: presenting the latest research studies, summarizing the best evidence available on different topics, reporting clinical observations with important educational messages, and also offering more than facts with provocative and stimulating opinions.

Scientific medical journals validate their content selecting and improving the quality of the manuscripts that they receive through the peer review process. Editors are the guardians of the peer review process and follow principles on editorial independence and recommendations and guidelines on the best editorial practices, including ethical standards of publication.¹ For it to be a transparent and honest process, editors should ask reviewers to disclose any conflicts of interest. Referees, like authors, are supposed to declare any potential conflicts of interest.² Editors should also disclose any relevant conflicts of interest regarding submitted manuscripts to their colleagues in the editorial team and excuse themselves from taking part in discussions and making editorial decisions whenever necessary.

The impact, quality and relevance of the content of scientific medical journals rely on motivated and competent readers, authors and reviewers. Too often editors would like to have more and more intervening readers, to receive better-structured and better-written manuscripts, and to recruit reviewers who are rigorous in the selection and accessible to assist in the improvement of the manuscripts.

Looking back as we celebrate our 40th anniversary, *Acta Médica Portuguesa* has come a long way. We only had a pool of 169 registered reviewers in 2012 but had just over 5000 by the end of 2018. Our pool of reviewers includes not only physicians and researchers but also epidemiologists, statisticians, health economists and other professionals with very particular types of expertise.

Author engagement has also increased substantially. In 2012 we received about 400 submissions but in 2018 we

received over 1100 from all over the world. We are more visible and engaged than ever with readers through our website, which since last year allows rapid responses to individual articles, as well as social media channels.

In the last decades, medical education institutions and authorities made a great effort in defining and making explicit the abilities needed for all domains of medical practice, including scholarship competencies. Among many other aspects, physicians should be able to integrate the best available evidence into practice by identifying, selecting and critically evaluating health related research and literature, and they should also be able to summarize and communicate the findings of relevant research and scholarly inquiry.³

To reach these goals, training in medical writing should be included in the curricula of medical education programs, starting at the undergraduate level in order to help students develop the skills to properly write, read, edit and review journal articles.

In 2015, we created our own student section, *Acta Médica Portuguesa Student*, which is entirely staffed and run by medical students with the support from senior editors.⁴ It not only provides an opportunity to recruit young blood and breed future generations of critical mass in medical editing in Portugal but it also provides a forum for debate for topics that are particularly relevant to undergraduate students.

Physicians should also be competent and proficient in critical reading and appraisal of the medical literature, and a consensus statement of the core competencies in evidence-based practice that physicians should meet was recently published.⁵ It is also important to produce well-prepared and readable articles and participate in the critical review and improvement of the articles of their peers. This matters if we want to increase the scientific competency of our profession and to improve the quality of the health care we provide to our patients and populations. There have been several initiatives over the last few years in Portugal

1. Editor-Chefe Adjunto. *Acta Médica Portuguesa*. Lisboa. Portugal.

2. Editor-Chefe. *Acta Médica Portuguesa*. Lisboa. Portugal.

✉ Autor correspondente: Pedro Escada. pedroalbertoescada@gmail.com

Recebido: 06 de março de 2019 - Aceite: 06 de março de 2019 | Copyright © Ordem dos Médicos 2019



to provide training in critical appraisal and scientific writing and there is also a wide range of online resources.

As medical journal editors, we are regularly invited to participate in lectures and workshops on scientific writing and journal publication in conferences and as part of outreach visits to academic centres nationwide, and see it as an important and rewarding part of our job. We can provide practical guidance and tips on how to report scientific work to the highest international standards to both new and seasoned clinicians and researchers. Nothing is more gratifying for a medical editor than to hear back from authors that our editorial processes helped curate

and improve the quality of their papers because that will ultimately benefit patients.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Pedro Escada is Professor of Medical Writing (Integrated Master Degree of Medicine), Professor of Science Communication (Doctoral Program of Medicine) and Professor of Otolaryngology at Nova Medical School, New University of Lisbon.

Tiago Villanueva is Associate Editor at The BMJ and BMJ Open.

REFERENCES

1. Recommendations for the Conduct, Reporting, Editing and Publication of Scholarly Work in Medical Journals. [consultado 2019 mar 4]. Disponível em: <http://www.icmje.org/icmje-recommendations.pdf>.
2. Hames I. Peer review and manuscript management in scientific journals: guidelines for good practice. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing; 2008.
3. Frank J, Snell L, Sherbino J. CanMEDS 2015 Physician Competency Framework. Ottawa: Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada. Ottawa: The Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada; 2015.
4. Cabral H, Câmara Pestana P. AMP Student: vision and point of view. Acta Med Port. 2015;28:133-4.
5. Albarqouni L, Hoffmann T, Straus S, Olsen NR, Young T, Ilic D, et al. Core competencies in evidence-based practice for health professionals: consensus statement based on a systematic review and Delphi survey. JAMA Netw Open. 2018;1:e180281.