



LOCAL RELEVANCE OR INTERNATIONAL VISIBILITY: A CHALLENGE FOR LATIN AMERICAN OBSTETRICS AND GYNAECOLOGY JOURNALS

In view of the application of new classification criteria, the most recent results of Notice 768 of 2016 regarding the Indexation of Specialised Colombian Scientific Journals - Publindex (1), showed a lower rating for *Revista Colombiana de Ginecología y Obstetricia (RCOG)* and many other medical journals in Colombia (2). The editorial committee of RCOG deemed it necessary to organise a meeting of the Latin American journals of the specialty in order to consider joint strategies designed to improve the scientific and editorial quality, as well as the visibility of the papers in each publication, for the benefit of the readers of the studies published in their pages as well as of the researchers cited in those studies.

Consequently, the editors of Latin American journals of obstetrics and gynaecology met during the XXIIInd Latin American Congress of Obstetrics and Gynaecology - 2017 held in Cancun, Mexico, with the support of the Steering Committee of the Latin American Federation of Obstetrics and Gynaecology (FLASOG). Invitations were extended to representatives of publications from Argentina, Brazil, Central America, Colombia, Cuba, Chile, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela, and the meeting was attended by eight editors, including the special attendance of the editor of *Revista Colombia Médica*. The purpose of the meeting was to develop strategies to ensure continuous improvement of each of the Journals and to enhance their international visibility in order to disseminate scientific production in the specialty and foster its appropriation for the benefit of the health of our women and children.

A description was given during the meeting of the approach adopted in Colombia regarding the new classification of the journals, consistent on using the reports and the classification generated by Scimago Journal Rank (SJR) and the Journal Citation Report (JCR) in quartiles, and the H5 index, among other criteria, which attach more weight to the citation by the researchers than to the visibility criteria by readers who are not necessarily researchers (2). The SJR visibility indices in the Latin American journals were analysed and it was found that only six are indexed: three in the Q3 category, and three in the Q4 category (3), meaning that they would classify at least under categories B and C in Publindex, respectively (4).

The use of external standards to assess the scientific quality, the visibility and the impact of Latin American journals does not take into account the realities of their local and regional environment, considering that they are means of communication of scientific societies and most of them lack the financial and logistic support they require in order to compete with international publishing houses or holdings. On the other hand, it does not consider the effort that editorial bodies of Latin American journals have to invest in order to maintain a constant stream of contributions that can guarantee the regularity and quality of scientific production. It is a fact that many of our researchers prefer to export their research to international journals with higher visibility even if this means that their work will not reach the audience that could benefit the most from their results. This phenomenon gives rise to an adverse selection according

to which studies with a lower level of evidence such as case reports, case series and knowledge reviews are “reserved” by the authors for low-visibility journals. This is compounded by the fact that specialists and researchers in the region lack training in the drafting of scientific papers, in terms of form and style. This may be attributed to the prevailing training in the specialty, mainly professional but not in research, creating challenges for the editorial work because of the need to review submissions repeatedly. These conditions pose an additional challenge to the work of authors and editors alike, beyond the well-known difficulties faced during the process of conceiving, developing and publishing research.

During the meeting, the editors arrived at the following conclusions:

1. The editorial and scientific committees of the journal, together with the scientific societies that support them, are called upon to define their own reach and objectives against the backdrop of the political and economic environments of their respective countries, without losing sight of the fact that there is a strong tension between international visibility and local relevance of accepted contributions.
2. There is a need to define and maintain minimum quality parameters for studies and collaborations published in each of the journals in the region. In order to achieve this goal, editors recommend the use of checklists that can be used to check the quality of the reports in accordance with the methodological design of studies available at <http://www.equator-network.org/> (5), a step already taken by *Revista Colombiana de Obstetricia y Ginecología* (6), and to unify guidelines for the authors of the journals in the region, at least in terms of the format in which manuscripts must be submitted.
3. Conferences, presentations, free papers and graduation theses or projects of candidates to the specialty of Obstetrics and Gynaecology are a potential source of full articles or abstracts to supplement the volumes of each journal, taking the necessary steps to avoid the risk of the ethically unacceptable conduct of duplicate publication.
4. A proposal aimed at enhancing visibility and helping with the editorial activity is for all the journals of the region to migrate to open publishing platforms and allow free access to full texts.
5. These changes should be in line with the strategic focus and the financial support of the scientific societies that support the publications, ensuring independence, accuracy and editorial transparency. It would also be important to introduce changes designed to provide modern readers with access to content: translation into English, mass dissemination through channels such as social media, and format adjustments to enable reading on electronic devices.
6. Given the shortage and difficulty of finding experts in all the topics of the specialty, another proposal that appeals to the spirit of regional collaboration is to share the training profiles of the peer reviewers and of the members of the editorial committees of each of the journals.

These proposals highlight the importance of the collaborative work of the Latin American network and aim at shedding light on shared problems affecting women’s health and their epidemiology, and on the local and regional clinical experience. If implemented, they will help identify and address new health, research and scientific production problems resulting from population migrations and displacements within Latin America.

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