

# Medical Journals Challenges in COVID-19 Pandemic Era

## Desafios das Revistas Científicas na Era Pandémica COVID-19

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The novel coronavirus pandemic has affected the world in multiple dimensions in a previously unimaginable way. On December 12 (2020) we already accounted for 72 millions of cases and more than 1.6 millions of deaths worldwide.<sup>1</sup> Major efforts are being done worldwide to mitigate viral transmission, to treat patients and to protect populations. Healthcare systems are facing a very difficult challenging time since resources are limited to deliver suitable and high-quality care to both COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 patients. The economic, social and cultural consequences of this pandemic are real, and we are not even able to project its future impact.

The need to know more about SARS-CoV-2 virus and infection as well as the way to treat and to prevent it, led researchers and clinicians all over the world to focus their work on these topics. To share scientific data in a fast way has become a critical need and an ethical imperative. We know that the new scientific evidence can, in fact, be crucial for clinical and healthcare system decisions, to better manage the pandemic in real time. However, we must take into account that never as now we had access to such amount of new daily ever-changing information. If today (December 12) we make a quick search on PubMed using "COVID-19", we find near 84 000 results which confirm the vast amount of scientific information that have been published since the beginning of SARS-CoV-2 outbreak.

Traditionally, authors mainly use scientific journals to communicate science. The process of publication of a scientific article is highly demanding and time consuming, since there is a need to evaluate the quality of evidence and filter out invalid, wrong

or problematic information. This is achieved by peer review and editorial processes, which can take several months to be finished.<sup>2,3</sup> In this pandemic era, this has become even more problematic. Journal editorial teams have worked hard to shorten time to publication dedicating extra time to analyze manuscripts rapidly, reinforcing the pool of reviewers and accelerating peer review.<sup>2,4</sup> Some journals, as New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM), for example, offered authors the opportunity of transference of manuscripts to other journals, with reviewer comments when available.<sup>4</sup>

There is evidence that COVID-19 articles are now being published in a fast way, the majority of it within a week.<sup>3,5</sup> A new concern is now arising: are we sacrificing quality for quantity? Much will be certainly said on this subject in the future. As an example, the Lancet Editors had published an expression of concern regarding the questionable quality and reliability of data presented in an article about COVID-19 treatment with hydroxychloroquine or chloroquine previously published in this prestigious journal.<sup>6</sup> Later, the evidence of misconduct led to the editorial decision of paper retraction. After this, no longer hydroxychloroquine was recommended for COVID-19 treatment because there was no scientific evidence to support it.

To launch a new scientific journal - Lusíadas Scientific Journal - during COVID-19 pandemic was a risky challenge, since healthcare workers are devoting their great efforts and time in patient's treatment. It is remarkable that they still find motivation and extra energy to collect data, to develop clinical investigation and to share their clinical experience. We want to provide au-

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thors the possibility of free open access publishing, which we consider to be a good opportunity. Ensuring a rigorous and fast editorial process and peer review, we intend to offer to our readers high quality scientific information that can be helpful for clinical practice.

The volume of research about SARS-CoV-2 infection published has generated the designation of pandemic publishing. In this context, our editorial decision to dedicate this current issue to COVID-19 could be perceived as a paradox. Despite that, we believe that as COVID-19 pandemic is still evolving, the focus and interest in scientific information about it remains. We consider that perspectives, narrative reviews and clinical cases/images now published can be relevant and useful for all that work on healthcare sector.

This particularly difficult year of 2020 is now coming to an end. We wish that 2021 can bring us new hopes to face this pandemic and its consequences, as well as a promising future for this new scientific journal.

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