Editorial

New year, new advice, new news

We start another year with this issue of the RBO, which now contains a greater number of studies. This was decided by the Editorial Board and the new directorate of the SBOT, in view of the ever greater number of studies sent for publication: instead of more issues, a journal with a greater number of studies.

The Editorial Board has been renewed through the entry of Professors Akira Ishida, Helton Delfino and Sergio Checchia, who replace Professors João Batista Volpon, Flávio Faloppa and Tarcisio Barros, three titular professors who have decisively contributed towards indexation of the RBO in SciELO. This renovation took place in accordance with the RBO’s statutes, which determine that each president of the SBOT, in conjunction with the Editorial Board, should renew one third of the Editorial Board during his mandate.

The new board has also renewed the Editorial Body and the Consultants’ Body, thus bringing in new names that have contributed greatly towards the RBO, as replacements for members who had asked to leave or who were considered to merit a period of rest, away from the complicated functions of editorial review. In conformity with the resolution agreed at the meeting of the RBO’s Editorial Board, at the 41st CBOT in Rio de Janeiro, we present the first Associate Editors: Philippe Hernigou – Paris, France; Fernando Fonseca – Coimbra, Portugal; José Neves – Porto, Portugal; Jacinto Monteiro – Lisbon, Portugal.

The RBO expresses its gratitude to those who are leaving for any reason and greets its new members.

In this editorial, we transcribe the document that summarizes AMB’s actions in relation to CAPES, aimed at placing greater value on Brazilian scientific publishing.

Classification of periodicals in the CAPES QUALIS system: changes to the criteria are URGENTLY needed!

The Brazilian Medical Association (AMB), concerned about the future of Brazilian scientific publications following the release of the new criteria for the CAPES QUALIS system, organized a series of meetings in its main office in São Paulo. Editors of the principal medical journals in this country, directors of ABEC (Brazilian Association of Scientific Editors) and coordinators of the CAPES fields of Medicine II and Medicine III exchanged information and, above all, drew up proposals for improving the process of evaluating Brazilian scientific publications through the new CAPES QUALIS system. Scientific production classified by means of QUALIS forms one of the main items for assessing postgraduate programs over the last three-year period. Considering that the main source of scientific articles for Brazilian journals is from postgraduate programs linked to CAPES, it is very important to refine the discourse and ensure a common language for all the parties involved. From the editors’ side, there is the fear that the new CAPES criteria may create a subclass of periodicals based exclusively on the ISI Impact Factor. The previous criterion indicated an impact factor of 1 as the cutoff point. Recently, some Brazilian journals were able to attain this level, through enormous effort. However, the new criteria not only consider the impact factor alone, but also establish much higher cutoff points. Through adopting this measure, Brazilian journals will become neglected by postgraduate supervisors and students – the great producers of Brazilian science – thus creating a vicious circle in which our periodicals will have difficulty in surviving.

Professor João Pereira Leite spoke on behalf of CAPES. In addition to coordinating the field of Medicine II, he is also the current representative of the field of health in the Scientific and Technical Board (CTC), the highest body within CAPES. At one of our meetings, he gave a detailed explanation about the criteria adopted during previous three-year periods and their impact on Brazilian postgraduate programs. He also explained that, in view of the evident improvement in the level of these programs, the cutoff or separation point needed to be raised in order to achieve better qualitative discrimination and stratification between them. Data coming from the programs, gathered through the CAPES system, showed that in many programs, more than 50% (and in some, more than 80%) of their scientific production was published in periodicals in the higher strata. In turn, CAPES decided to create a greater number of strata in order to be able to reclassify the periodicals. A descending scale was put forward, according to the impact
factor: A1, A2, B1, B2, B3, B4, B5 and C. In addition, an equivalence factor was created, according to which the sum of published papers in journals in lower strata would be equivalent to a smaller number of papers in higher strata. Thus, for example, for a given field, two B1 articles would be equivalent to 1.2 A1 articles; one B1 article + one A2 article would be equivalent to 1.4 A1 articles; and three B2 articles would be equivalent to 1.2 A1 articles. According to Professor João Leite, “this equivalence will benefit journals with different levels of qualification”. He also stated that the new classification was drawn up based on the median impact factor of the journals, as obtained from the Journal Citation Reports (JCR) and calculated annually by the ISI Web of Knowledge. To calculate the median, a list of the journals in which each CAPES field publishes was drawn up. From this list, and from the respective impact factors, the median was calculated for each field and the new stratification was constructed, consisting of A1, A2, B1, B2, B3, B4, B5 and C.

The editors argued against the position of Professor Leite, recalling that the three-year nature of the CAPES assessment process conferred a relative mismatch in reclassifying the periodicals, given that several Brazilian journals will have their impact factors increased or published for the first time over the course of 2010, particularly those that have just been admitted to the ISI. Furthermore, they would have to wait three years to change categories within the new QUALIS. Another point that the editors questioned was in relation to choosing the impact factors published by the Journal Citation Reports (JCR) as the ONLY universal index for gauging the quality of periodicals. Journal impact factors have large standard deviations and, certainly for this reason, CAPES used the median of these indices to analyze the production pattern of postgraduate programs. In fact, according to this criterion, the best journals for some medical specialties such as surgery have lower impact factors, which could imply a bias that would be extremely unfavorable for them.

The two sides agreed that placing value on Brazilian periodicals is important for national scientific growth and development. To ensure and stimulate this virtuous circle, it is necessary to stimulate and encourage the citation of articles by Brazilian authors and to intensify the efforts of editors, reviewers and authors of periodicals towards increasing the quality of articles, among other measures. Concomitantly, it is necessary to obtain greater support from government bodies, especially CAPES and CNPq, with regard to administration of financial resources and qualitative stratification, respectively.

The results from these discussions were presented at various meetings of editors, postgraduate program coordinators and researchers, and they were complemented by new suggestions. It is hoped that these ideas, described below, will serve as a conclusion for this editorial and that, at the same time, they will be an important tool for changes to the periodical classification criteria in the CAPES QUALIS system, to be made by the bodies responsible for them. The proposals are as follows:

- The qualitative analysis of Brazilian periodicals should be reassessed and not just involve the impact factor published by the Journal Citation Reports (JCR);
- The particular characteristics of each field of interest or each specialty should be taken into consideration and respected;
- The Brazilian editorial sector, differing from the rest of the world, where it is maintained basically through private initiative, is funded by public and private universities and the scientific associations of professional categories;
- Brazilian periodicals require greater support and encouragement, which could come in the form of: bursaries for editors, financial support for publication, greater visibility for national periodicals abroad, criteria for qualitative classification that are more objective and comprehensive, and differentiated support corresponding to the performance of each journal;
- Support for internationalization of scientific periodicals, by means of support for professionalization of the editorial process and dissemination of journals in other countries;
- Continual updating of periodical classification within the new QUALIS, without having to wait for the three-yearly evaluation;
- Participation by representatives of professional categories (ABEC and AMB, among others) in the decision-making process regarding the CAPES QUALIS system;
- Vigorous stimulation of citation directly at the source, i.e. the postgraduate programs, for example, by determining that postgraduate programs graded 6 and 7 not only need to have a percentage of published papers in high impact journals, but also should have percentage quotas of published papers in Brazilian periodicals. Through this, the two extremes of scientific publication will be taken into consideration, since young future researchers start their careers by publishing in Brazilian periodicals under guidance from experiences researchers.

Finally, to corroborate all these actions, and with concern regarding the development of repercussions from the new CAPES QUALIS and other assessments on periodicals, the Brazilian Association of Scientific Editors (ABEC) dedicated three days of its last National Meeting of Scientific Editors, held in November 2009, to forums for specific fields. At this meeting, representatives from CAPES and editors from all the fields of scientific knowledge discussion the subject at length and, in the end, put forward the Guidelines from the Forums for Specific Fields of the 12th National meeting of Scientific Editors – 2009, which will be sent out to all Brazilian agencies for research support in due course, and this will occur periodically, since the process is continuous.

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