



About the publication of medical articles in Colombia and other demons

De la publicación de artículos médicos en Colombia y otros demonios

Ximena Briceño-Morales, MD¹ y Clara Briceño-Morales, MD²

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Mr. Editor:

We recently delved into the world of medical writing and gained first-hand experience of the inner working of this universe. Our first attempt at publishing was discouraging. We discovered that the process is permeated by different interests that determine what can or cannot be written. Our work in surgical oncology became the rationale for the attempt at excluding us from the debate on the use of radiotherapy in cancer management.

Allow us to briefly describe this experience. Driven by what happened during the COVID-19 pandemic, we decided to look into short fractionation regimens and radiotherapy omission in the treatment of breast cancer, not only as attractive but needed options in the turmoil in which the health systems were plunged and which forced them to redistribute their financial and human resources in order to cover the needs of the populations most affected by the disease. We searched for the evidence on which these management strategies were based, and we documented the results of our research in two manuscripts which were submitted to a specialized oncology journal in our country.

After a peer review process which lasted six months, the two manuscripts were rejected, but not without first undergoing countless revisions requested by the reviewers, in what turned out to be a fruitless endeavor, as the final decision of the editors was to turn down the articles. During that time, we received conflicting comments. Some reviewers argued that the manuscripts were irrelevant as they “created little new knowledge,” while others just asked for “proofreading.” We still believed that the papers were relevant given that no other publications in Spanish were available on this specific topic.

Finally, the most subjective and unacceptable argument used to disqualify the papers was that no radiotherapy specialist was included as author. This is shameful because it infringes authorship confidentiality and goes against the standards of fairness and impartiality, not to mention that it clearly points to other interests at play when it comes to publishing certain articles. Is it then that a mastology specialist and a surgical oncologist can write about radiotherapy only with the acquiescence of a radiotherapy specialist? To our inquiry about the review process, the assistant editor replied that “editors can reject a paper at any time in case of concerns regarding the integrity of the work,” while the assistant editor argued that ours were considered “more as opinion papers than review articles, and that opinion articles are written by experts in the topic”.

* Correspondence: Ximena Briceño-Morales. Dirección: Calle 50 # 13-76. Edificio Rodas, Torre A, apartamento 404. Bogotá (Colombia). elmastocito@yahoo.com.

1. Mastologist, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Bogotá (Colombia).

2. Cirujana oncóloga, Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira, Pereira (Colombia)

Notwithstanding, this experience allowed us to hone the manuscripts and explore other publication options. After a new peer review process with a Spanish journal, the two papers were finally published (1,2). We urge those who wish to advance academic production in Colombia not to despair and to continue to write and build a more inclusive and fair stage for medical publication, where criticism is less prominent and authorship is not handed out on the grounds of compromise or fear of stigmatization or rebuff.

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