

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

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Medical Research and Publishing During The Pandemic: Uncertainty and Responsibility

Dear Colleagues,

The last issues of medical journals are always a good opportunity for the editors to take a look at what happened in this particular year. Therewith, the editors can make a balance sheet between the achievements and failures of their journal. These re-considerations bring to the editorial team the feedback to improve the journal in any terms.

I am sure that many editors of medical journals have a lot to discuss for the year 2020. Just like the previous one, 2020 was also a turbulent year for healthcare providers, researchers as well as medical publishers. In this short editorial, I would try to make a summary of direct as well as secondary impacts of the pandemic on medical publishing.

The COVID-19 pandemic is undoubtedly the biggest global health threat that our generation has witnessed. As of November 2021, there have been over 250 million cases worldwide with over 5 million deaths (1). Despite all of our tremendous achievements in medicine, this virus continues to be a lethal threat for all humanity. As a result, there have been important consequences on medical publishing.

Firstly, the COVID-19 pandemic has deeply affected the execution of medical research. During unpredictable conditions of the pandemic, there was no easy way to design a study, especially prospective ones. Researchers, who tried to set up a study method, could not foresee what would happen during the study period. A new wave of the pandemic would eventually change all critical factors such as manpower, institution resources, patient admissions, and etc. Even though we do not have solid data, there was a declining tendency for submissions of prospective studies. Medical journals are stages of scientific research, and the quality of the journal is closely related with the quality of the papers being published. The unpredictable nature of a global pandemic has undoubtedly affected this point, which defines the "uncertainty" side of the pandemic in terms of research. I do hope that the readers consider it when they assess the current tough situation of the medical journals. One must not forget that the quality of the journals is strongly related to the submissions they receive.

On the other hand, we should remember the responsibility of the researchers and the editors. Since the beginning of the pandemic, there has been a clear trend to conduct research regarding COVID-19, which is quite comprehensible. The rapid onset of the pandemic has led the scientists to perform studies in this field. There has also been a tendency to shift in providing grants to research on COVID-19, especially in the rich countries of the world (2). This significant scientific action is not comparable with other examples in the past, which actually did not affect the richest parts of the world. For instance, there were only 42 papers on Ebola from the Authors with Guinean affiliation in the 2 years following the outbreak (3). This number was 312 for Brazil during the Zika outbreak.

However, we can only name our experience in the COVID-19 pandemic a "rainfall of publications". If you had typed "COVID-19" on the search engine of PubMed as of the beginning of November 2021, you would have seen about 198.650 results. This huge number is a perfect demonstration of the mass production of COVID-19 papers. For one thing, it is good to retrieve diverse important information for physicians, and for the other, it is confusing for them in taking urgent decisions in their daily works.

Turkish Journal of Surgery has also received a significant number of submissions regarding the COVID pandemic for the last two years. This increase of submissions seems to be a global fact. Ball and Harvey have reported their experience in the Canadian Journal of Surgery during the pandemic (2). They have observed a prompt shift towards COVID-19, in regards to submission topics. Due to the exceptional feature of the pandemic, they have facilitated the reviewing process for the submissions about this new global threat. Therefore, in the Turkish Journal of Surgery, we did the same thing too, and opened our pages to some prominent studies or guidelines about COVID-19. Of course, the rules and limits of a single scientific journal do not allow to publish all of the submissions. It is just impossible. On the other hand, the editors also have the responsibility to take part in the fight against infodemic and misinformation, which is nowadays extremely common. The power of misinformation through social media should not be underestimated.



This is not only confusing but also dangerous. As it was emphasized in the joint statement of prominent global institutions in September 2020, "misinformation costs lives" (4). Scientific journals should support - on their turn - to spread true information. We consider it our mission.

Anyway, a year is over again. Let's hope for a better and healthful new year.

On behalf of the editorial team and the Journal's staff, we wish you a happy new year 2022!

Kindest regards,

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