

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

PUBLISHING IN PHYSICAL AND REHABILITATION MEDICINE: A EUROPEAN POINT OF VIEW

Sir,

We read with interest the paper by Frontera et al. (1) regarding the main issues relevant to the publication of research in Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine (PRM), including the peer review process, and the role of specialty journals. This kind of paper helps the target audience to understand better the mission and “philosophy” of these core journals in PRM and informs readers about which journals are most suitable for publishing their research.

The aims of this letter are: (i) to discuss the relative relevance of international PRM journals from a European perspective; and (ii) to request that further information is provided and to suggest some additional policies regarding publication procedures and audit in PRM journals.

The first lines of Frontera et al.’s paper (1) explain that 27 journals are identified in the most recent 2006 *Journal Citation Reports* (JCR) in the category “Rehabilitation” and that the authors of Frontera et al.’s paper include Editors-in-Chief of 4 of the most prominent of these journals: *American Journal of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation* (AJPMR), *Archives of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation* (APMR), *Disability and Rehabilitation* (DR), and *Journal of Rehabilitation Medicine* (JRM) (listed in alphabetical order). We agree with the high standing of these 4 journals, even if they are ranked – according to their impact factor – at 2nd (JRM), 6th (APMR), 14th (AJPMR) and 17th place (DR) in their JCR category. We recognize, in fact, that the impact factor has little relevance for evaluating scientific productivity and can be biased (2), and that other factors have a stronger bearing on what makes a journal a leader in its specific field (3). It is not by chance that the Consensus Committee on “International Rehabilitation Journals” of the European Society of Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine (ESPRM) (which was set up to establish common European criteria for judging the “quality” of scientific productivity of European PRM specialists) in its meetings in Lausanne (March 2006), Athens (September 2006) and Bucharest (September 2007) selected the 4 journals listed above, along with *Clinical Rehabilitation*, as the 5 top journals that European researchers in PRM should consider as first choice for publication of their research. The same Committee indicated 4 additional journals as crucial for the history and future strategic development of the specialty in Europe: *Annales de Réadaptation et Médecine Physique*; *European Journal of Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine* (formerly *Europa Medicophysica*); *International Journal of Rehabilitation Research*; *Physikalische Medizin, Rehabilitation Medizin, Kurortmedizin (Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine)*. Together, these journals cover the wide range of European tradition, research, development and strategic planning in PRM (from physical medicine to transdisciplinary

rehabilitation interventions, from the acute hospital to community integration, etc.) (4, 5).

The Committee (many of whose members are on the editorial staff of one or more international journals) made its decisions based on expert opinion corroborated by a series of bibliometric indices and evaluations, which it might be useful to list briefly here. The peer assessment reviewed and considered:

- the indexing of the 3 main international databases in the biomedical field (in our specific category): the ISI – Journal Citation Reports (Rehabilitation), NLM – PubMed/Index Medicus (Physical Medicine; Rehabilitation) and EMBASE (Rehabilitation and Physical Medicine; Rehabilitation; Physical Medicine);
- the aims, scope and contents of each journal, including instructions to authors;
- the composition of the editorial staff (Editor-in-Chief, Associate Editors, Editorial Board, etc.), including the percentage of PRM specialists, divided into European and other;
- the availability, and ease of access to, online content;
- patterns of cross-citations (i.e. as cited journal and citing journal), as in JCR;
- the circulation in European countries (where known).

An external validation of the Committee decisions came from a bibliometric survey showing that the 5 top journals selected rank from the 1st (JRM, $n=43$) to 5th position (AJPMR, $n=10$) in terms of recent publications by 10 members of the European Academy of PRM (coming from 9 different European countries), chosen randomly (total number of publications considered = 272).

Frontera et al. (1) also state that authors “should select the journal that best matches the nature and potential readership of their research” and “should consider the mission statement of the journal, the author guidelines, the composition of the editorial board, and the journal’s publishing history to establish that the scientific or clinical areas of interest of the journal reflect the desired target population”. Again, we agree. However, as national delegates of the ESPRM and/or of the Union Européenne des Médecins Spécialistes (UEMS) PRM Section and Board, we invite (in reply to this letter or as a dedicated paper) the submission of further information about the factors listed below, regarding the policies of each journal.

Peer review process. Table I in Ref. 1 is rather generic. The “best” journals make a great effort to evaluate and improve the quality of submitted papers (6). For example, we think it is important that at least 2 reviewers examine each manuscript (for more than 90% of papers selected for peer review), because several areas of expertise may be relevant to a given submission, and reviewers often recognize different aspects

of scientific quality. On the other hand, the level of agreement between reviewers is usually not high (7). Thus, we consider it crucial that the Editor-in-Chief is the person who always makes the final decision about acceptance after reading each manuscript, as consistency of judgement is a key factor.

Acceptance and rejection rate. Competition among articles is a factor driving quality (3). The range 30–65% referred to in the paper is related neither to a specific period nor to a specific journal (1). We are interested to collect data about the percentage of immediate vs later rejections (for both solicited and unsolicited manuscripts) in the last years (in 1-year windows), and in the absence of geographical biases in the priority ratings (8).

Timeliness of the publication process. Researchers are very interested in the average manuscript turnaround times and publication time (total time from submission to final decision, in the different outcomes) (9). Moreover, we encourage the practice of listing the dates of receipt and acceptance of manuscripts in the published article.

Dissemination. As authors, we want the maximum possible visibility and impact for our publications. As readers, we think that a wide audience strengthens the scientific claims of articles and overall quality of the research literature. For this reason, we are interested in: (i) the global circulation and number of subscribers in different continents (both paper and online versions); (ii) the availability of e-pub ahead of print; (iii) the possibility that this final “preprint” version is retrievable and citable (e.g. by the Digital Object Identifier, DOI).

We recognize the complementary nature of paper and free internet versions, including the association between being online (as open access, “self-archived” or otherwise openly accessible articles) and being cited more often (10). Thus, we take heed of all journal policies to provide greater access to scholarly publishing.

Finally, we would like to draw attention to the fact that the selection of the most suitable journal is driven not only by the criteria discussed above, but also by the area of interest. For clinicians and researchers in PRM, a wide range of journals beyond those referenced under “rehabilitation” in the JCR are potentially relevant. A recent paper has identified journals relevant for distinct scientific fields, including the biomedical rehabilitation sciences and engineering, integrative rehabilitation sciences, and human functioning sciences (11). Moreover, we suggest that the rehabilitation journals should now consider the development of new common standards for publication, specific to rehabilitation. For example, with the development of the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) it is now timely to develop standards based on the ICF for the reporting of functioning, which is the core concept of rehabilitation (12, 13).

We thank Frontera et al. (1) again for their contribution. We hope that other international PRM journals will follow their model; the willingness to engage in debate, thorough evaluation and disclosure of performance is an additional indicator of high quality for both Editors-in-Chief and journals.

Conflict of interest. Franco Franchignoni is Associate Editor of *Journal of Rehabilitation Medicine* and Senior Editor of

European Journal of Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine (formerly *Europa Medicophysica*). Gerold Stucki is a member of the Editorial Committee of *Journal of Rehabilitation Medicine*; Co-Editor of *Physikalische Medizin, Rehabilitationsmedizin, Kurortmedizin (Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation)*; Associate Editor of *European Journal of Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine* (formerly *Europa Medicophysica*). Veronika Fialka Moser is Co-Editor of *Physikalische Medizin, Rehabilitationsmedizin, Kurortmedizin (Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation)*. Guy Vanderstraeten is a member of the Editorial Committee of *Journal of Rehabilitation Medicine*. Lajos Kullman is Associate Editor of *International Journal of Rehabilitation Research*.

Furthermore, one or more of the authors are on the Editorial Board of the following international PRM journals mentioned in this letter. In alphabetical order: *Annales de Réadaptation et de Médecine Physique; Clinical Rehabilitation; Disability and Rehabilitation; European Journal of Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine; International Journal of Rehabilitation Research; Journal of Rehabilitation Medicine; Physikalische Medizin, Rehabilitationsmedizin, Kurortmedizin (Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation)*.

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RESPONSE TO LETTER TO THE EDITOR BY FRANCO FRANCHIGNONI ET AL.

We thank Franco Franchignoni and co-authors for their interest in our recently published article. We also greatly appreciate their interest in our point of view regarding a very important issue; the publication of research that will enhance the field of Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine. It has not escaped our attention that the authors of the letter are respected colleagues who share our concern and enthusiasm for the growth of our field and the challenging task of editing a professional journal. Their comments based on their experience as editors of high-quality journals are of particular value.

We agree with many of the suggestions made by Franchignoni and co-authors and support the idea that publishing in scientific journals should follow accepted principles and that journals should disseminate the information necessary for authors to make informed decisions. Furthermore, we agree that all journals should work towards maximum transparency

and uniformity, helping authors to understand what is behind decisions to accept or reject scientific manuscripts submitted for publication. The discussion regarding indicators of journal operations is complex because each journal has its own tracking systems, obligations to its association/publisher, and philosophy on what should or should not be disclosed. However, if we work together these issues can be resolved.

We should take advantage of international meetings to discuss with authors and editors ways in which the different journal policies can be harmonized. Perhaps a dedicated “Council” of editors of rehabilitation journals could be created to address this issue (and others). We look forward to future opportunities to continue this exchange of ideas.

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