



The risks of rapid publications during the Covid-19 pandemic

Os riscos das publicações rápidas durante a pandemia de Covid-19

During Covid-19 pandemic, a number of scientific articles has been submitted in scientific journals. Studies with diverse scientific qualities and levels of evidence have been sent to the most renowned journals, seeking to disseminate original findings, corroborate known premises or reveal to the world potential cures for this new disease.

The need to speed up scientific information regarding diagnosis, treatment, management and outcomes, of Covid-19, has put pressure on scientific journals to accelerate their editorial processes.

Although it can represent a positive opportunity for processing improvement (simplification of processes, agility, improvement of electronic means and speed between submission and publication), a hidden danger emerges and is directly related to publications made without peer review.

In this short period of a few months, it was possible to witness the dissemination of relevant scientific findings - published in journals with a high impact index - subsequently denied after analysis by expert reviewers on the respective subjects.

The danger of skipping stages is well known in the scientific community, and which is why numerous requirements have been created and must be respected, under penalty of summary refusal of a submission. This condition includes the need to submit studies to approval by ethics committees, information on the role of each co-author in the study and the use of consent form in clinical studies. On author's view, scientific security of a study only increases the chances of publication with credibility. So, this is a good thing.

The need of content revision by experienced reviewers without any kind of scientific bias is also a positive point to increase the quality of studies. Reviewers must be exempt, enjoy reading and teaching, helping the progress of science, without negative feelings. The ideal condition for a review is that it is carried out without knowledge of the authorship, by an odd number of reviewers (greater than 1, obviously) offering constructive comments on design, content and conclusions.

The rush to disseminate information cannot overcome scientific dignity. The so-called scientific exceptionalism cannot be ahead of the 5 correct principles of research, as mentioned by London and Kimmelman in a recent article published in the journal *Science*¹, which are: importance of the study, adequate design, analytical integrity, complete report of the study and viability.


Publication without revision in the so-called pre-print mode has been used to disseminate studies even before their formal acceptance. According to ASAPbio¹, an initiative led by scientists in favor of the use of preprints in the life sciences², "A preprint is a complete scientific manuscript that is placed by the authors on a public server. The preprint contains complete data and methodologies; it is often the same manuscript that is being submitted to a journal (...). After a brief inspection of quality control to ensure that the work is of a scientific nature, the author's manuscript is published on the Web within approximately one day without undergoing peer review and can be viewed free of charge by anyone in the world". It is clear that there is a risk in accepting information from these studies as "absolutely reliable". Likewise, publishing without reviewing can cause permanent risks to a scientific journal. In addition to compromise the credibility of important scientific journals, it causes confusion in the recommendations and, as we know, the denial never has the same impact as the first news, and can keep false information permanently. The website *retractionwatch.com*³, as an example, lists from January to

June 2020, 25 articles published about Covid-19 that had retractions, permanent (22) or temporary (3). These articles included 14 published articles, 9 pre-printed articles, 1 letter and 1 event communication. Some of these publications took place in the most renowned scientific journals worldwide.

There are ethical ways to accelerate the dissemination of clinical research, its ideas and results. The best example is the dissemination in electronic media of articles accepted and not yet addressed to specific issues of a journal. Traditionally known as “ahead of print”, they allow a fast appearance in the scientific world with virtually all the relevance of an article already published.

The desire to first publish new information can never go beyond the ethical limits of scientific

publication. This is our goal and will always be our rule.

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