



EDITORIAL

Another Jack in the box. The “academic cartel”... is just our imagination?



It is difficult to survive in the world of science. The “publish or perish” idea is, unfortunately still widely practiced. To publish a scientific article in clinical medicine, it is important to have an original idea, patients, resources, and state of the art technology. Once you have accomplished or developed your research, the contribution should be published. The next step is to prepare a manuscript and choose the ideal journal for submission to ensure an appropriate research exposure; usually, that means a periodical indexed publication in English with worldwide distribution and prestige, usually associated with a high impact factor, and also with rapid response and fair peer-review.

Medical scientists in low to middle-income countries (LMIC) can struggle to develop and perform original research in limited-resource contexts, while also dealing with “complicated” reviewers. Some ideas regarding these issues have emerged; in 2002 in the American Society of Hematology’s journal, *Blood*, Dr. Sivakumaran¹ published an interesting letter entitled: “The academic cartel: another pernicious weed in the field of academic medicine.” In his work, he signaled that some academics and institutions might believe that somehow a particular area of research “belongs” to them. Making efforts to promote their points of view while assuming a self-appointed expert role in their area of interest is, I believe, only natural. However, going so far as suppressing a difference of opinion and, with it, relevant research articles on the subject is a not a welcome “Jack in the box.” Unfortunately, it is my opinion that currently, this is still a frequent practice.

Is the cartel word appropriate?

The structure of the scientific field and academia may resemble a drug cartel. Alexandre Alfonso² in his article “How Academia Resembles a Drug Gang” states that “the academic job market is structured in many respects like a drug gang, with an expanding mass of outsiders and a shrinking core of insiders.” Alfonso states that senior professors in academic institutions continue to earn money and maintain prestige at the expense of the mass; just like drug lords

do with their dealers. In science, just a few remain in this “shrinking core”, they continue to publish their data in well-known journals and, sometimes have the power and opportunity (as an unnamed peer reviewer) to keep other groups with different ideas away.

What can we do to deal with an “academic cartel” kind of reviewer?

Although it can appear complicated at first glance, there are a variety of actions that can and must be implemented at the “bureaucratic,” general administrative level of research. It is important to present a united solid frontline that can effectively neutralize research discrimination and foster low and low-middle income countries’ scientific production to international standard levels. These actions must include the identification of research interests in the scientific national agenda and to establish an adequate, fair and balanced equilibrium in relation to basic and clinical research. No need to be naïve when performing this task; it is important to recognize that if we can produce relevant research and meet current taxing world class standards, we will obtain inclusion in first-class journals. We must recognize that it is neither fair nor reasonable to expect acceptance by international peer-reviewed highly competitive journals when the quality of research is not what it should be. At the individual level, we all have a responsibility to generate valuable research, be it basic or clinic. It is not a valid option to just be part of the flock and act playing along pretending to do research without actually doing it or motivated by selfish and/or mercenary reasons.

Epilogue

However, going back to the “publish or perish” idea, the world of open journals has led many medical scientists in unfavorable circumstances to the opportunity of publishing their work. We believe that the so-called “predatory journals” with unethical scientific perspectives must cease to

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exist, but at the same time, editors of prestigious journals must be aware of the so-called academic cartel... or, is just our imagination?

References

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