Ibero-American Cardiovascular Journals. Proposals for Much-Needed Collaboration

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The Ibero-American scientific societies of cardiology have always maintained close contact and actively collaborated on different scientific, academic and social initiatives. This most-special relationship is based on deep, common cultural roots that constitute our identity and bind us together and is best exemplified by the languages we share: Spanish and Portuguese. However, our roots are not solely bound to the sociocultural context—they transcend this, reaching academic, university, and scientific spheres where we share a relatively uniform vision and challenges. The Ibero-American societies of cardiology have traditionally maintained strong links and teaching agreements, at under- and postgraduate levels, and the different national conferences of cardiology have always been enriched by the participation of numerous Ibero-American cardiologists from other countries. We need only recall the many Spanish-Portuguese conferences of cardiology or meetings of the Interamerican Society of Cardiology, the Central American Society of Cardiology, and the Caribbean Cardiac Society.

The biomedical journals constitute one of the most important aspects of the scientific societies. The fundamental objective of these journals is to publish scientific articles of the highest possible quality, attain excellence in their editorial process, and achieve the greatest dissemination possible for their contents. In this way, they can build greater international prestige and recognition and make themselves more attractive to research groups and their own readers. Fundamentally, the biomedical journals publish 2 types of article: original research articles—where investigators share and disseminate findings, essentially in order to push forward the frontiers of knowledge—and review articles—intended to provide top-quality, continuing medical training.

The national Ibero-American cardiovascular journals (IACVJ) consist of all the official cardiovascular journals of the different national societies of cardiology in Latin America, Spain, and Portugal. Although they may seem highly heterogeneous, these publications clearly share fundamental elements (among others, the languages), have similar aspirations, and

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face similar editorial challenges in an ever more competitive and globalized scientific world. To date, occasional collaboration between IACVJ has been merely anecdotal with no formal or institutional agreements of any kind.\textsuperscript{14,15} However, it seems obvious that we should collaborate closely to successfully improve our visibility, disseminate contents, and design editorial strategies of mutual interest.

With this objective in mind, the “I Meeting of Ibero-American Cardiovascular Journal Editors” was organized under the auspices of the Revista Española de Cardiología and took place on March 30, 2009 in Orlando (Florida, USA) during the American College of Cardiology Conference. All IACVJ editors-in-chief were invited to participate. Prior to the event, a detailed, structured questionnaire (40 sections) was designed and sent to each of the individuals responsible for a journal so they could complete it with their principle editorial and bibliometric data.

The present document describes the results of the aforementioned meeting, presents the most important IACVJ editorial data, reports the proposals and editorial initiatives discussed at the meeting, and summarizes the agreements reached.

I Meeting of Ibero-American Cardiovascular Journal Editors

All IACVJ editors-in-chief were invited to the meeting. Those who were unable to attend were represented by their associate editors or the president or secretary-general of their respective national societies.

Twenty-two official representatives of 17 IACVJ from 16 countries attended the meeting. After a review of the meeting’s fundamental objectives, each editor made a formal presentation of their journal. Later, all the information needed to construct a joint database was prepared and correct completion of the abovementioned structured questionnaire was reviewed.

Finally, a fruitful debate took place on a range of editorial and scientific issues of mutual interest. Initially, we dealt with topics raised during the presentations (with constructive suggestions for improvements made by several editors). Later, formal proposals were made for their consideration and debate. Among the most important of these was the suggestion we should establish official links between the national societies of cardiology in order to share common editorial resources. We thought it appropriate to develop stable agreements favoring close editorial collaboration between geographically close societies or with societies that have no official journal.

Similarly, the issue of the lack of a research tradition in many Latin-American countries was raised. Dr Ignacio Chávez's oft-quoted, deeply-held conviction that “our only possible redemption in the scientific terrain lies in producing” was highlighted for its current validity in Mexico. We were reminded that, in their respective countries, the editors are at least partly responsible for encouraging greater recognition of the merits of research when individuals’ curricula are evaluated for them to obtain professional or academic recognition. Without doubt, initiatives like these would stimulate research and publication among the new generations of Ibero-American cardiologists. The importance of facilitating a transition towards electronic publications—ideally with open access—was stressed,\textsuperscript{16} as were the challenges this entails, including measures needed to guarantee preservation of contents. Online editions represent an urgent challenge; they bring with them lower edition costs and, above all, improved international diffusion of IACVJ. Moreover they could help overcome problems like the lack of indexation, delays in edition, and limited print-runs, that affect some IACVJ. Recognized, well-accepted Ibero-American repositories like the Sistema Latindex and the SciELO Project do exist\textsuperscript{17,18} They are based on new information and communication technology and record, evaluate and give access to full-text versions of the journals. In Spain, the Índice Médico Español database\textsuperscript{19} and in Mexico, the Artemisa database,\textsuperscript{20} constitute interesting initiatives with similar objectives. Undoubtedly, the hegemony of English as the lingua franca of the scientific world cannot be questioned but, should we not be able to measure in some way or other our influence on knowledge and the real scientific impact of what we produce?\textsuperscript{21,23}

Moreover, we were reminded how important it is that editors should be vigilant in overseeing their national societies to ensure they guarantee the priority of the official over other publications, whether of different sub-specialties or specific geographic areas, that in specific circumstances could compete for sponsorship with the official publications. Where other publications exist, it was suggested close coordination was essential to ensure they never compete with the general interests of the official journal. This issue proves especially relevant in times like the present, when widespread economic crisis limits publishing budgets. We also debated the issue of which national cardiovascular journals should receive maximum priority to obtain official aid for research and development.\textsuperscript{24} The IACVJ should aspire to achieving and maintaining the highest
standards of editorial quality. This long-term process is delicate, laborious and, above all, expensive. So, we cannot fail to be surprised at the lack of state aid that, if forthcoming, would guarantee it. We need to gain the support of the authorities involved in scientific-technological planning and in the teaching and research institutions so as to favor the development of measures of quality and achieve greater recognition for the IACVJ.\textsuperscript{21,22} The editors are responsible for transmitting to the relevant institutions the importance of maintaining publications of excellence as a key element to permit research to develop adequately in each country.\textsuperscript{21,22} Unfortunately, institutional changes in some Latin American national societies have conditioned changes in budgets and in the frequency with which scientific publications appear; occasionally, these factors have had highly negative consequence in international appreciation of journal quality. Similarly, although in some Ibero-American countries the publication in national journals is duly encouraged and specifically recognized—both in academic and university assessment processes and in scientific and technological institutions—paradoxical situations remain, in which these publications are undervalued and/or discriminated against.\textsuperscript{21} If we do not improve the quality of our journals we cannot complain that nationally-generated research can only reach a certain level of recognition in international contexts far from the reality of our countries. Some forms of cardiovascular disease that predominantly affect Latin-American countries are paradigmatic examples of this.\textsuperscript{25,26} We cannot accept that all the information required for decision-making should systematically come from solutions adapted from research conducted in contexts far from the reality of our countries. Moreover, we cannot accept the intellectual claudication derived from always waiting for “others” to do the research. Once again, editors have to accept their fundamental role in guaranteeing adequate curricular recognition of research studies published in IACVJ. Finally, we highlighted the editors’ function in favoring the development of evidence-based medicine and disseminating the scientific societies’ clinical practice guidelines.\textsuperscript{4,27,28}

The participants coincided in considering the meeting reported here a success and a historic event, both for being the first event of its kind and for the interest and transcendence of the issues debated.

General Editorial Data

The information presented at the meeting and the analysis of the structured questionnaire enabled us to construct a common database with information available through all the IACVJ. Surprising as it may seem, prior to the event we did not even know the exact number or correct addresses of all the different IACVJ. The most important IACVJ editorial data is summarized in Table and the URL addresses are in Appendix. Currently there are 17 IACVJ. Seven societies do not publish a journal at present; 3 of these did previously do so. The Sociedad Puertorriqueña reported its intention to launch a new journal and the Sociedad Cubana de Cardiología will also launch a new national publication (CorSalud) this year, in electronic format only. Two countries (Argentina and Mexico) have 2 different, official societies of cardiology and each of these publishes its own scientific journal. The first journal published was Archivos de Cardiología de México, founded in 1930, and the most recent launch was of the Revista de la Sociedad Paraguaya de Cardiología in 2003. Four journals have been in existence for over 50 years and 12 for over 20. All the journals analyzed have a full-text paper edition and 15 have an electronic version too (all of these have free full-text access). Fourteen journals accept for consideration manuscript submitted in electronic format; 6 have incorporated a complete electronic manuscript management system. Four journals have their own web site and the remaining 11 are located on the respective national society’s web site. Paper edition print runs range from 11 000 (Arquivos Brasileiros de Cardiologia) to 400 (mean, 2494; median, 1500). Only 3 journals are monthly and 5 publish more than 4 issues a year. Fifteen journals publish all article abstracts in English. Sixteen journals are published in Spanish (5 of them are also available in English in full text) and 2, in Portuguese (Revista Portuguesa de Cardiologia translates full-text contents into English in the same paper edition; Arquivos Brasileiros de Cardiologia, translates into both Spanish and English in their electronic edition). All journals publish original articles and 15 use a peer review system. Ten publications edit self-financing supplements\textsuperscript{59} separate from the
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<td>Yes</td>
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ES indicates Spanish; EN, English; PT, Portuguese.  
1Articles are published in English when the manuscripts submitted are in English.  
2Biannual supplement.  
Data presented in alphabetical order by country.  
Full table available at: www.revespcardiol.org
Proposals for Editorial Collaboration

1. To establish preferential direct electronic links connecting IACVJ websites

Our objective is to make it easier for researchers to send manuscripts to IACVJ. The characteristics, topics, bibliometric indices and manuscript acceptance rates differ between the IACVJ. These data are assessed by researchers when sending manuscripts for publication. Moreover, while some journals receive more manuscripts for consideration than they can publish, others clearly need original articles. An open, multidirectional flow of information would be much appreciated by potential authors and would benefit all IACVJ.

2. To jointly write and simultaneously publish a document in all IACVJ

The data, agreements and proposals presented in the present article have been reviewed and finally accepted by all the editors-in-chief who are signatories to this document.

3. To maintain a common database describing the most important editorial and bibliometric characteristics of the IACVJ

The editors of the different IACVJ commit themselves to annually updating this electronic database.

4. To establish an “Ibero-American Editors Forum”

The fundamental objectives of this forum would be to facilitate debate on editorial issues of mutual interest, to monitor the evolution of the proposals presented here, and periodically hold joint editorial meetings.

5. To implement the basic editorial norms of the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (previously known as the Vancouver group) in the IACVJ 30-36

These norms establish widely-accepted and validated uniform requirements intended to improve the quality of the scientific and editorial process. They cover many technical and formal issues but, more and more, they emphasize the need to establish ethical norms of activity (authors, reviewers and editors) to preserve the credibility of the scientific process. 30-36 Adopting these general norms leaves the independent editorial policy of each journal unaffected.

6. To collaborate and evaluate the editorial proposals generated by other international associations of editors

   a) General journals: International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (World Association of Medical Editors [WAME]) and the Council of Science Editors. 37,38
   b) Cardiovascular journals: Heart Editors Action Round Table (HEART group) and the European Club of Cardiovascular Editors (ESC Editor’s Club). 39,40

7. To help disseminate the scientific contents generated in IACVJ as widely as possible

Currently, many of our journals are not included in the most prestigious international bibliometric databases. At least in part, this is because some of these databases tend to favor English-language publications. 21,22,41-45 Thus, a vicious circle is generated — which it is difficult to break out of— leading to IACVJ original articles being cited much less often and, what is even worse, IACVJ citations not being evaluated. In fact, many studies widely quoted in IACVJ—ie studies with substantial scientific repercussions—are underrepresented in international index evaluations because these citations are simply not computed. This problem, together with the negative bias on the part of many researchers to studies in languages other than English added to US researchers’ less-frequent citation of European and Latin-American studies, helps explain the poor dissemination and evaluation of our scientific articles. 21,22,42,43

Consequently, we IACVJ editors commit ourselves to favoring the dissemination and citation of original scientific studies exclusively on the basis of their scientific rigor and content.
We also commit ourselves to collaborating to ensure that the greatest possible number of our journals can be made available via the most prestigious repositories and international databases.

Conclusions

The IACVJ are heterogeneous but have very important similarities. Above all, they face common challenges that they take on together in a more and more competitive and globalized scientific world. The IACVJ editors are convinced the initiatives we describe in the present article will help increase collaboration between our journals and further stimulate relations between our respective national societies. These proposals are intended to increase the dissemination, credibility and international prestige of all our publications.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For their collaboration in facilitating information for the joint database, we would like to thank Dr Liders Mercado and Dr Edgar Pozo, President and Past President respectively of the Sociedad Boliviana de Cardiología; Dr Alejandro Villeda, President of the Sociedad Hondureña de Cardiología; Dr Nelson Salazar, President of the Sociedad Nicaragüense de Cardiología; and Dr Héctor Delgado, President of the Sociedad Puertorriqueña de Cardiología.

REFERENCES

41. Seglen PO. Why the impact factors of journals should not be used to evaluate research. BMJ. 1997;314:497-502.

APPENDIX. Ibero-American National Societies’ Official Cardiovascular Journal URLs

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