

On the shoulders of giants

Nos ombros de gigantes

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Becoming the chief editor of *Arquivos Brasileiros de Oftalmologia* (ABO) in 2010 was one of the most prestigious honors I have ever received. The idea of following my mentor and long-time professor Dr. Harley Bicas in this task was overwhelming. Dr. Bicas assumed his position as editor-in-chief after the Belfort family created the most important ophthalmological journal in Latin America. The Belforts (Waldemar, Rubens Sr., and Rubens Jr.) were responsible for the early Herculean days, where they had to search for authors and articles while maintaining their high standards. Their capacity to keep the journal's periodicity through many difficulties, political and financial, as well as their altruism in donating the ABO to the Brazilian Council of Ophthalmology, created the family's legacy. But this was not all they accomplished. While on the administrative board of ABO, Rubens Jr. continued to assist with the journal, setting goals and pushing the editors to innovate, always based on maintaining the most respected values of good science, virtue, and ethics.

Dr. Bicas was responsible for creating the structure of the journal, defining the basic editorial rules for publications and peer reviewing. He invited a group of excellent and committed associate editors who had to uphold his standards for perfection. With his passion for mathematics and the Portuguese language, every paper would undergo the stringent standards that he set, which was not an easy task for the authors.

To be or not to be

When I became editor, my first question to the board was about the language to be used in ABO. Until 2010, the journal articles were published in Portuguese with titles and abstract translated to English. Knowing that this was a sensitive question to Dr. Bicas, we discussed it at length. The administrative board voted to start publishing the articles in English with the abstract in both English and Portuguese⁽¹⁾. This meant that we had to reorganize all of our written materials, such as instructions for authors, submission interfaces, and all internal communications to English. It was not an easy job, considering that, although the great majority of scientists in Brazil are fluent in English, it is not our second language. I began creating a 100% web-based submission platform and rationalizing our Internet channels. After a few years, with the help of SciELO[®], we were one of the first Brazilian journals to move to the ScholarOne[®] platform and were able to further improve and optimize the submission process⁽²⁾. Next, we professionalized scientific editing by having all of the manuscripts edited internationally. To avoid delaying the publication process, I personally assumed the post-editing suggestions for every single manuscript and translated all titles and abstracts to Portuguese. I believe I also have some of my mentor's obsession for perfection...!

Ethics

Continuing to reinforce the tenants of the Belfort family legacy, based on the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors, we created a policy for disclosure of conflict of interests and authorship definition^(3,4). We developed a strict policy regarding IRB approval and the Clinical Trials Registry. But our biggest step was to screen all papers for plagiarism. As ABO was the first Brazilian scientific journal to screen all papers for plagiarism, we had to create internal policies to evaluate the

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reports created by Ithenticate^{®(5,6)}. By implementing the aforementioned policies, ABO ethics and transparency has achieved the highest standards⁽⁷⁾.

Learning every day with an amazing team of editors

Over the past 7 years, I have had the opportunity to work with an amazing group of associate editors. They have not only handled their duties but also generated numerous topics to be discussed. I have learned much from them regarding methodology, statistics, style, guidelines, standards, bibliometrics, etc. All discussions led to the final ABO policies and created a culture of meritocracy⁽⁸⁾. Brazil has a continental area that creates difficulties and opportunities. We had to ensure that our meetings were effective in standardizing the assessments made by our editors. At most of our meetings, we have discussed actual articles and evaluated them on the basis of a few simple points: does the article raise a relevant question? Does it have a valid hypothesis? Is the methodology capable of detecting the expected results? Were the results presented clearly? All answers had to be yes in order for the article to follow the editorial process⁽⁹⁾. After peer revision, the editors would reject approximately half of the submitted papers, and those papers following the editorial process would have a final answer in an average of 45 days.

Results achieved

The mathematics of journal ranking can be very tricky. The general idea is straightforward: if a significant percentage of articles published in a specific journal are frequently cited, the journal will achieve high indexes. Nevertheless, the reality may be different. As a matter of fact, even highly ranked journals will have many poorly cited articles, which is even more critical for the averaged-ranked journals. The editor’s job is to look at all submitted articles and find those that may generate impact in scientific knowledge and, therefore, receive citations. Most of the articles published in ABO will never be cited but some may make a difference. I estimate that over these 7 years, I may have screened more than a thousand manuscripts with a rough acceptance rate of 50%. It feels like gold mining, reading an article that is the first to address or present alternative creative approaches for answering determined scientific questions. Thanks to our esteemed authors, many articles on the Zika virus published in ABO⁽¹⁰⁻¹²⁾, as well as other interesting papers⁽¹³⁻¹⁵⁾, have generated an important

increase in our rankings over 7 years (Figures 1 and 2). Thanks to the work of the previous editors, the ABO has achieved many successes, such as being the only Latin American ophthalmological journal listed in the Journal Citation Report and available in PubMed^{®(16)}. Keeping the journal’s ideal of free access has allowed us to be visible and easily accessible at SciELO[®] and one click from PubMed^{®(16)} (Figure 3).

Future of scientific communication

The amount of information available to society these days shadows the perception of knowledge that one is able to achieve during a lifespan. The Web of Science

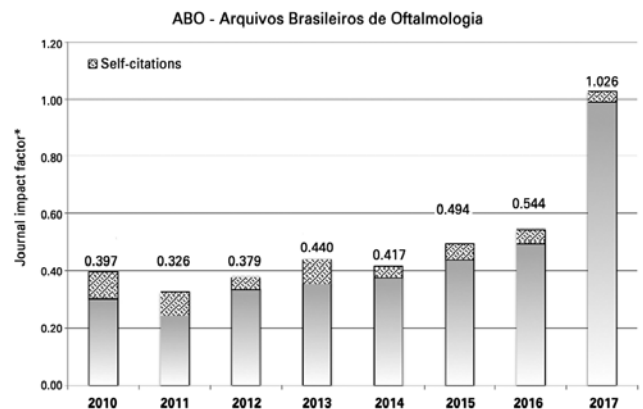


Figure 1. ABO - Arquivos Brasileiros de Oftalmologia Impact Factor[®] from 2010 through 2017. The impact factor (IF) from a specific year (Y) is calculated by dividing the number of cited papers (CP) in the specific year that have been published in the previous 2 years by the number of citable published papers (CPP) in the same period (IF=CP/ CPP). For example, 2017 IF is the fraction between the number of citations in 2017 related to papers published in 2015-2016 by the number of published papers in the same period.

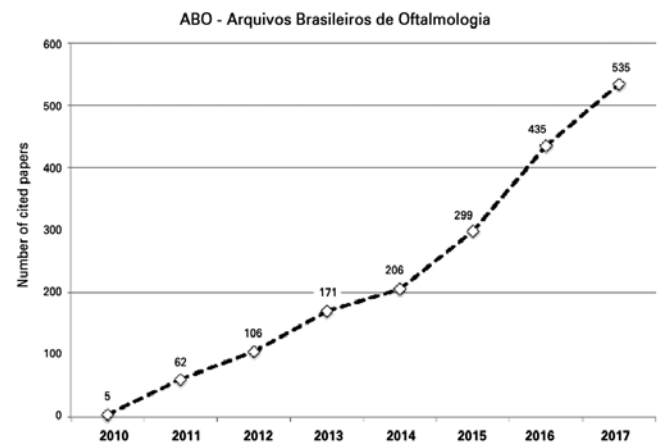


Figure 2. ABO - Arquivos Brasileiros de Oftalmologia cited papers from 2010 through 2017.

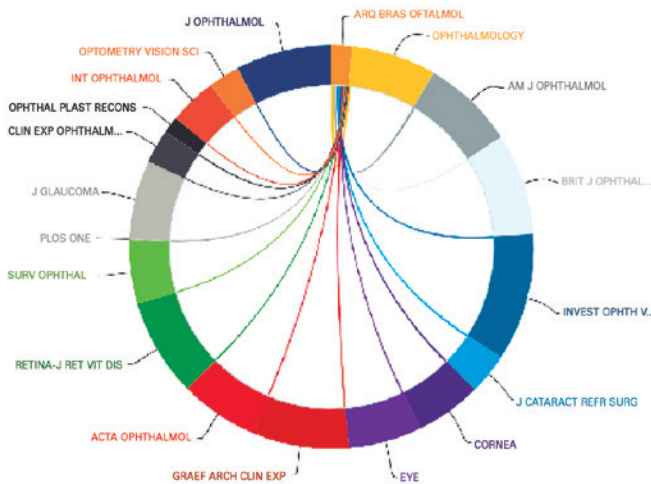


Figure 3. ABO - Arquivos Brasileiros de Oftalmologia relationship with other journals. Manuscripts published in journals represented in the circular graph have cited ABO in 2017. Source: InCites® Journal Citation Reports dataset updated June 6, 2018.

database alone has >2.5 million documents related to clinical medicine. With the advance of purely digital journals, the length of a manuscript is not a problem for publishers anymore - bytes are cheap - the lack of space limitations for publications may expose readers to unnecessarily lengthy materials, making it even more difficult to absorb so much information. Awarding the amount of publications in an environment with unlimited publication opportunities has led science to a dangerous context where its validity has been questioned⁽¹⁷⁾ and to avoidable data dredging as well as “p-hacking” by generating a suspicious excess of statistically significant results⁽¹⁸⁾.

This excess of opportunities to publish articles and the lack of reasonable time for the reader to critically analyze them makes an editor’s work similar to that of a broker by helping the reader save time and absorb as much useful information as possible.

This is what I have learned from the Giants.

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