

Visibility, the current challenge for publishing policy!

More than a decade ago, LaPorte et al. [BMJ 1995; 310(6991):1387-90] predicted that hard copy scientific journals from the health field would have to undergo important changes in order to avoid obsolescence. Today, there is no relevant journal that does not have its own corresponding electronic version.

For authors, the “publish or perish” imperative symbolizes the “recognized” form of access to the scientific elite, the equivalent of having publications in “high-impact” journals. Journals will thus need to provide authors with the possibility of having their articles cited, a process whose feasibility depends on its availability and is favored by the electronic edition. And although everything looks the same, especially in PDF, in reality everything changes: drafting, submission, storage, and ease of recovery, affecting each of the intermediate processes. However, no one can overlook that a journal’s electronic edition also produces a considerable increase in its *visibility*, a situation proven and recognized by the Institute for Scientific Information/Thomson Scientific, which promotes and maintains the Impact Factor (<http://www.thomsonscientific.com/media/presentrep/acropdf/impact-oa-journals.pdf>).

The strongest wager on visibility emerged with the Open Access Initiative (OAI), a movement in favor of open, permanent, and free access to the scientific literature. The OAI has an important foothold in the Ibero-American world, where it is important to highlight the contribution by the Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO), a virtual library of full text scientific literature in the health sciences and vanguard of the OAI, with the capacity to generate bibliometric indicators and which has just celebrated its tenth birthday.

Yet the OAI is not the only effort promoted by the Editorial Boards of health sciences journals to enhance their visibility; other initiatives include the existence of their own websites, the application of metadata to favor interoperability protocols (Dublin Core Metadata Initiative), positioning the publications in the principal bibliographic databases, participating in journal collections, favoring the use of descriptors like key words, supporting common measures by journals in the same field of knowledge [Culebras et al. *Nutr Hosp* 2006; 21(1):2-3], promoting the publication of articles in different languages, especially English [Barreto ML. *Rev Saúde Pública* 2006; 40(N Esp):79-85], adopting the requirements of publishing movements with the greatest prestige (committee of biomedical journal editors), establishing links between the bibliographic reference lists and the full text of the respective articles, especially if the reference is to the journal itself, fostering the implementation of new indicators similar to the OAI (hits, downloads, visibility), and above all improving the publication’s quality.

All of the above may fail to produce the desired results if the journals lack collaboration by the main actor, namely the author. Let us answer one simple question: if the citation is the acknowledgement of an intellectual debt to a prior source of information, where do I obtain the information and how do I help locate it?

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