

# The role of the reviewers' verdict in the growth of the Brazilian Journal of Physical Therapy

O papel do parecer dos revisores para o crescimento da Revista Brasileira de Fisioterapia

The Revista Brasileira de Fisioterapia/Brazilian Journal of Physical Therapy (RBF/BJPT) has been growing steadily in the last few years, both in the number of articles and in the quality of the articles. Among the several people who have been contributing to this growth, it is important to highlight the role played by the reviewers in charge of the submissions. Without the voluntary contribution of these individuals who dedicate their time to the RBF/BJPT it would be virtually impossible to produce a high-level scientific periodical such as this. However, since the number of submissions has increased, a greater number of reviewers is now necessary to carry out the analyses of the submissions. This growing demand in the number of reviewers is certainly a challenge to the development of the RBF/BJPT, since without their generous contribution, we would not have the means to achieve, much less maintain, the quality of the articles published.

The demand for reviewers is determined by the number of articles submitted each year. For 2009, we have an estimate of 420 submissions, 80% of which will probably be in Portuguese. For each article submitted, three reviewers, at least, are required. Thus, approximately 1,000 reviewers should contribute annually to the journal, considering that each one of them can only give his or her verdict on one article per year. Considering that according to RBF/BJPT criteria, the same reviewer is able to make from two to three annual reviews, the number of reviewers needed would drop to around 400 a year. This excessive figure becomes even higher due to the constant refusals to contribute as a reviewer, and mainly to the delay in carrying out the task (often without any response to our contacts), a situation that calls for last-minute replacements.

The first measure taken by the RBF/BJPT to reduce this demand was to invest the Area Editors with the power to refuse to submit the manuscript for review if it does not meet certain requirements in the course of its analysis. In the process of initial review, the editors are guided to answer the following questions: Is the manuscript pertinent to the Physical Therapy field (i.e. the scope of the journal)? Does the manuscript bring a new contribution to this area? Does it have scientific merits? Only the articles that are positively evaluated regarding all these criteria are forwarded to the reviewers. Thus, even articles methodologically sound may be refused if they are not consistent with the scope of the journal or if they present results already established in the literature.

Even with the new criteria for acceptance and submission of the manuscript to peer-review, a significant number of reviewers is still in demand. Thus, researchers from several areas (physical therapy, occupational therapy, physical education, medicine, nursing, among others) are invited to contribute to this process. Invitations made to reviewers with different levels of experience have resulted in a certain lack of uniformity concerning the judgment of the articles. For instance, articles accepted on the condition that small modifications be made, or those that require major changes in order to be published, are frequently subject to the same amount and level of criticism. In the sense of reducing this diversity in the final verdicts, the RBF/BJPT changed its form aiming

at better directing the reviewing process. In addition, the reviewers are receiving detailed instructions on how to give out their judgment. Thus, it is important to make these points clear to the readers, who are, after all, potential reviewers.

To accept a manuscript for publication, the RBF/BJPT expects it to be original and to present valid results. In addition, the article must suitably review and summarize the literature, be clearly written, be relevant to physical therapy or rehabilitation fields, and have the potential to generate an impact in the body of knowledge of this area. The manuscripts that meet the criteria stated above, but which do not focus on subjects directly relevant to the area, must be classified as being out of scope and recommended to another journal. In contrast, the decision to accept a manuscript with minor changes, without the need of a further review, indicates that it only requires a few additional comments or references which might improve the text as a whole. Furthermore, spelling and grammar mistakes, as well as formatting errors (text or figures) or the duplication of information in the text, can be easily corrected by the author without the need of a new analysis by the reviewer.

The conditional acceptance of a manuscript, with the need of major changes and an additional review, is generally indicated in those cases when it is necessary to include new theoretical or experimental information so that the manuscript can fulfill its objectives. The requirement to correct methodological flaws that do not render the study invalid or to dramatically shorten or reorganize the manuscript also points to the necessity of a new revision. Texts which are difficult to read, or that have problems concerning its presentation or the clarity of the concepts under discussion, as well as those which call for a greater detailing of the procedures of the study, equipment or analyses, but which may still bring a contribution to the field, are classified as acceptable on condition that they undergo a major revision. Conversely, the decision to refuse a manuscript with the possibility that its authors carry out a meticulous text revision and submit it as a new manuscript must be based on the need of further analyses or data collection that may change the results and/or the discussion of the manuscript. Moreover, if a manuscript which is potentially relevant to the area needs corrections in aspects that might result in a substantial change to the introduction, discussion and/or conclusion of the study, it should be rejected with the possibility of a new submission after the flaws have been corrected.

Some plausible justifications (not necessarily all of them) for a refusal include the detection of methodological flaws that cannot be repaired, that the work is a duplication (not only confirmatory repetition) of a previously published article, or that the manuscript does not provide new information when compared with the quality of other recent contributions to the field. Other factors that may indicate the need to refuse the work are the identification that the manuscript has a commercial nature, or the identification of contradictory results that were not elucidated by the author or which are unexplained by the established knowledge. The RBF/BJPT considers it essential that the rejection not be based purely on differences of opinion or theoretical position. These divergences, granted they do not correspond to fundamental flaws in the study, must be highlighted to the editors, but do not constitute a reason for refusal. Whenever the reviewer decides to reject a manuscript, it is expected that his or her point of view will be exposed diplomatically and that it is sufficiently documented. A negative report must be written using the same style one would like to read in case his or her own manuscript had been rejected.

The RBF/BJPT publishes preferably original reports of research concerning physical therapy and its professional field, disseminating basic studies on human movement as well as clinical investigations on the prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation of movement disorders. Because of our goal to render this an international journal, we expect that the published articles will have an increasing chance to be quoted internationally. In order to achieve that, we count on the voluntary and essential contribution of our reviewers. Thus, it is expected that they act sensibly and carefully to preserve the good articles while those which still do not possess the merit to be published receive educational verdicts that contribute to the scientific growth of the authors who wish to publish their research.

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