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Editorial

Achieving Excellence in Publishing: Is English a Must?

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As we enter into the 21st century and become integrated within an emerging global culture, we have witnessed remarkable advances in science and technology. In particular, the international medical/scientific community is participating in a world consortium of information, knowledge and resources, in order to reduce global health inequalities.

Distance learning technology has become an important tool in order to help foster scientific cooperation. Many medical education programs have been developed and are being taught, via satellite technology, to medical personnel worldwide. Surgical techniques are shared in this manner and with the utilization of current technology, operating room-to-operating room experiences are becoming increasingly common, giving patients the advantage of the best possible treatments necessary for complex surgical procedures.

The globalization of healthcare is occupying an important position in this century. *The wide and unhampered diffusion of scientific information is crucial in our society.* Many developing countries have been “shortchanged” in this publishing arena because of language barriers. There has even been prejudice against scientific literature coming from developing countries, with labels such as “low quality” being attached to many papers. Science is pursued vigorously in developing nations, despite many social, economic and sometimes political adversities. There must be support from “home nations” as well as developed countries in order to reduce these adversities; hence, we must see heightened concern in the wider scientific community and with governments of developed nations.

It can be said that English is the internationally accepted language of research communication. For scientists, English is virtually the only language. The issue of language is a sensitive

one and takes into consideration factors such as national identity, heritage and culture. But this should not blind scientists and journal editors in non-English-speaking countries to the obvious fact that in order to have the widest circulation and greatest impact in the international community, as well as to enhance their nation’s prestige and visibility in the world of science, publication in English is necessary. The scientific community should support researchers and journal editors who choose to publish in English, thereby advancing their nation’s scientific interests⁽¹⁾. Those whose native language is not English risk being unaware of—and overlooked by—mainstream international research unless they learn to read, write, and publish in English⁽²⁾. With the advent of computer technology, and with computer software and documentation being expensive, duplication in different languages becomes prohibitively expensive.

As stated by Benítez, Salamanca and Morey⁽³⁾, the goal of scientific communication is to transmit knowledge. If there are barriers preventing this type of communication, then we are defeating the purpose for the communication. On the other hand, any process that furthers the transmission of knowledge promotes the purpose of communication.

The *principles* of scientific writing are derived from the *purposes* of scientific writing. The basic purposes of scientific writing are 1) to *record* (the function of research journals); 2) to *inform* peers; and 3) to *educate* the next generation of scientists. The traditional medium for communicating information is the scientific/medical journal. Simply put, scientific publications are the medium through which physicians, surgeons, and scientists tell their peers in other organizations about their work. Being familiar with the literature allows the professional community to learn what is being accomplished in their specialized areas, to build on existing work, and to contribute something new. In this regard, a journal that can be shared by the international community will have the best opportunities to be read internationally and to attract authors to share their experiences and results.

In an editorial by Garfield⁽⁴⁾ in *The Scientist*, he speaks of scientists abroad, especially those whose native language is not English, that their views are ignored by the English-speaking world. Most foreign authors read and speak English but may be shy to write and publish in another language. With the assistance of translation programs and English-speaking editors, even a rough translation, to later be “polished” during an editorial review, can be accomplished.

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Hence, the time is here to review and update language policies of medical, surgical, and scientific journals regarding the acceptance and subsequent publication of manuscripts in English, in order to integrate Mexican scientific literature into the global arena. The 21st century holds the promise for exciting and innovative advances in communication technology as relates to information dissemination, storage, and retrieval systems for an intellectual and highly scientifically trained population. In order to meet these future challenges, barriers must be removed from the global information consortium. It must be recognized that we are all part of one intellectual community.

“There is no practical obstacle whatever now to the of an efficient index to all human knowledge, ideas, and achieve-

ments, to the creation, that is, of a complete planetary memory for all mankind”.

“World Brain: The Idea of a Permanent World Encyclopaedia” by H.G. Wells, 1937.

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