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Scientific Editors

FORUM FOR SCIENTIFIC EDITORS involved in Public Health

In August 2006, during the Eighth Brazilian Congress of Collective Health and the Eleventh World Congress of Public Health, the *Revista de Saúde Pública* organized a discussion forum on the dissemination of scientific production in the field of public health, as part of the activities for commemorating its 40 years of existence. Organized in collaboration with BIREME and ABRASCO, the Forum brought together the editors of most of the Brazilian scientific journals in this field, and also the editors of the journals of the Pan-American Health Organization and World Health Organization, the editors of public health journals in several Latin American countries and the Brazilian editors who work with the *American Journal of Public Health*, *American Journal of Epidemiology* and *International Journal of Epidemiology*. The coordinators of postgraduate courses in the field of public health also participated in the Forum.

The main objective of the Forum was to strengthen the scientific periodicals in the field of public health, with the aim of consolidating what Abel Packer, the director of BIREME, called “the main southern current” in disseminating scientific knowledge regarding health.

Over a day of intense activities, a variety of matters relating to editorial production were discussed, including polemical topics such as the primacy of the impact factors calculated by the Thomson Scientific for assessing the quality of the science produced in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The Forum also examined the criteria that have guided the inclusion of periodicals in SciELO’s Public Health Collection. Through recognition of the importance of free access and of BIREME’s work in indexing and disseminating Latin American scientific production, the participants in the Forum considered that there is a need to review the restrictive criterion adopted by SciELO’s Consultative Committee, of only including journals that have previously achieved indexation in the MEDLINE database or in the Journal Citation Reports (JCR) of Thomson Scientific. As backup for this discussion, BIREME presented a comparative study on the basis of SciELO’s evaluation model, among three groups of periodicals: SciELO’s Public Health Collection; the foreign journals most cited by this collection; and the journals included in the SciELO collections of Latin American countries but not included in the Public Health Collection. From this comparison, it was demonstrated that only two characteristics distinguished the journals that did not form part of SciELO’s Public Health Collection: their periodicity tended to be lower and the proportion of national authors tended to be greater. On the other hand, considering all the Latin American and Caribbean periodicals within the broad field of health sciences, it was seen that only 28 of them are indexed by the JCR, while MEDLINE indexes 65, SciELO 141 and LILACS 690. Therefore, by restricting inclusion in SciELO’s Public Health Collection to periodicals with indexation in MEDLINE or JCR, SciELO ends up reinforcing the so-called “main current” instead of strengthening an “alternative current” in the south.

Also in relation to the SciELO database, it is important to emphasize that the criteria for inclusion in the countries’ collections are already very rigorous, thereby valuing the quality of the periodicals. Between 2001 and 2005, only 15% of the requests for inclusion in the database were approved. Presence in SciELO increases the visibility of any periodical, since today this database provides around six million downloads of articles per month and it is among the top ten consultation sources of Google Scholar. The accesses originate from more than 500 cities scattered across all the continents, while Brazil is in first place in terms of numbers of accesses, followed by the United States and Portugal.

Another important conclusion that the Forum reached was that it would be appropriate to use the scientometric indices generated by SciELO, in combination with or complemented by the impact factor from the JCR. This combination would be particularly relevant in assessing the scientific production from Brazilian postgraduate programs and in formulating national scientific policy. It was also noted that the statistics from SciELO allow

evaluation of the dialog between journals. For example, overall data since the beginning of SciELO show the *Revista de Saúde Pública* as the most cited within the scope of SciELO's Public Health Collection. The citations in the *Revista de Saúde Pública* basically come from *Cadernos de Saúde Pública* (55%), its own articles (34%) and *Revista Panamericana de Salud Pública* (9%).

From the presentations by the different editors present at the Forum, it could also be seen that the peer review process utilized by the *Revista de Saúde Pública*, and also by *Cadernos de Saúde Pública*, is as rigorous as the process practiced by the high-prestige international journals in this field. The characteristic that most distances our journals from the international ones is the longer time periods between submission and publication (or rejection) of the manuscripts. By way of comparison, the *American Journal of Public Health* has an average time of 2.6 months between manuscript submission and the first response given to the author, 4.5 months between submission and acceptance, and 8.7 months between submission and publication. These time periods are even shorter for the *International Journal of Epidemiology*, for which the first decision takes an average of 18 days and the final decision, after peer review, takes an average of 68 days. Both of these journals have fully computerized systems for submission and evaluation of manuscripts, which allows substantial shortening of the time taken for publication. The *Revista de Saúde Pública*, in turn, is still taking an average of nine months to approve manuscripts and 13.7 months to publish them, since it has not yet concluded the computerization of its submission and evaluation system. As a way of compensating for these time periods that are still very long, SciELO's initiative for implementing the "ahead of print" system is now at the test phase. In this, as soon as the article has been duly edited, it is published electronically, independent of whether the printed edition is complete or not. *Revista de Saúde Pública* is one of the first journals to be part of this system. Ahead-of-print publishing is expected to ensure faster dissemination and indexation of articles.

We hope that, as recommended unanimously by the participants, the Forum of Scientific Editors in the field of Public Health will be repeated in future congresses of ABRASCO. It would, without doubt, be an important contribution towards improving our scientific periodicals and enabling better representation for Latin American science within the worldwide scene. The set of presentations made during the Forum is available at BIREME's website: (<http://www.eventos.bvsalud.org.forumsp>).