ARTÍCULO ORIGINAL

CIMEL 2020, Volume 26, Number 1

Editors shortage in the only biomedical journal edited by medical students in Peru

Gianella Alejandra Arias Aronia,a,b, Mirella Anduaga Dueñasa,a,b, Jhancy Alexa Martínez Aurisa,a,b

a. Sociedad Científica de San Fernando, Lima-Perú
b. Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, Lima – Perú

INTRODUCTION

The magazine status depends largely on its editors. Therefore, it is appropriate to define what it means to be an editor and the important role within a magazine.

The editor is the essential human component for the operation of a journal, because he assumes the responsibility to disseminate the most reliable information in a specific area to the medical community and thus, contributes to the visibility of the journal (1, 2). In addition, it ensures the knowledge integrity about to be published objectively, as well as encourages the review of information among peers. In the same way, its role as an evaluator is fulfilled within the editorial process, by giving an assessment of the quality and content in the manuscript at a first phase. Finally, it plays a vital role in author-reviewer communication, who are understood only through the editor.

The Ciencia e Investigación Médica Estudiantil Latinoamericana Journal (CIMEL) is the only current national biomedical journal, which includes as an editorial team, medical students affiliated with the Federación Latinoamericana de Sociedades Científicas de Estudiantes de Medicina (FELSOCEM). Currently, it has 16 active editors compared to 24 in the past administration, a number that is insufficient to respond to the demand for submitted projects.

In the previous administration, a total of 144 manuscripts were received; while, this year 64 articles have been received, with a distribution of 3 writings (on average) for each active editor. Therefore, this number is expected to rise, as it is insufficient given current demand.

Faced with this problem, we have seen it necessary to analyze what are the possible causes that lead to this deficiency in the number of editors. This will guide us to provide a better overview for future administrations and to propose appropriate solutions.

1. Situation of editors at CIMEL

CIMEL magazine has editors in various Latin American countries. According to the survey, with prior informed consent to the editors, the country that hosts the most editors is Peru, editorial house since 2003. (Graph 1).

At present, it is recorded that the permanence period of the editor in the journal varies from 1 month to 2 and a half years; however, a minority exceeds 6 months in the position. (Graph 2).

The editor shortage is a constant challenge that has become more acute in recent years. Therefore, it is convenient to analyze the main difficulties faced by publishers and, consequently, their early departure.

2. Possible reasons for the lack of editors in the only student biomedical journal in Peru

a. Lack of interest in research

According to bibliometric indicators, Latin American scientific production is lower compared to other regions; even many journals belonging to this territory are not indexed in world relevant databases. These factors, coupled with low citation rates, contribute to the region’s low visibility and can be explained, in part, by the lack of investment in research and development (3,4).

Therefore, it is not surprising that medical students face
these same problems and are even more limited in conducting research (5).

Graph 1. Number of editors in CIMEL, according to the country of residence during the 2020 management.

Graph 2. Seniority time of the editors at the CIMEL magazine during the period 2020.

The usefulness perception of research in future life reaches up to 80% in Latin American medical students, who consider that this activity should be carried out at some point during their career; however, many are projected to specialize in the clinical area for economic reasons, lack of support or because they consider research as an extracurricular activity detached from their future interests (6).

In Peru, it was calculated that the scientific production prevalence in a student was 13.9% between 2010 and 2016 (7).

Likewise, in a study where Spanish-speaking magazines in Latin America were analyzed, Chile and Colombia presented higher student production during 2011, with 38 and 19 articles, respectively (8). Although these figures are the reflection that, over time, interest in undergraduate research has increased, the students who have chosen to develop in this activity are still a small percentage.

In this context, the role of scientific societies of medical students in Latin America (SOCEMs) is remarkable, since it has been shown that belonging to one of these groups increases the probability of undergraduate scientific production (9). This way, the SOCEMs participate in activities related to research such as congresses, training sessions and even magazines aimed at medical students such as CIMEL; thus, both projects become training spaces that favor the learning skills for scientific communication (9).

The editors that the journal has are related to their society and all affirm that their level of knowledge in research methodology is, at least, basic. Most have already participated in a research work, including 21.4% have published in a journal. In addition, 71.4% affirm that this previous experience positively influenced their decision to be an editor. There by, this preliminary knowledge can be considered as an advantage because it facilitates the work as an editor and avoids complications in the training phase. In addition, it encourages medical students, whose scientific society belongs to FELSOCEM, to learn about CIMEL and its importance within the scientific knowledge dissemination.
b. Lack of training in research and editing, by the Faculties of Medicine

An editor requires preliminary training to do his job properly; however, the magazine is in charge of instructing its editors. In addition, the existence of little or no prior knowledge makes this process difficult. 85.7% of the editors’ state that within their curriculum there is, at least, a course related to research methodology. Also, regarding courses related to scientific publication and the editorial process, only 28.6% state that they have, at least, one course of this type within their curriculum. Furthermore, more than 50% of the editors consider that these courses were not formative within their role in the magazine. In addition to qualifying them, for the most part, as deficient or not very good.

In this context, before any editor is part of the magazine, they must complete a series of basic training to ensure their professionalism in the performance of their duties. At CIMEL, specific modules are esteem which are evaluated through assignments and certifications in writing courses. Fulfillment of this process commits time, which is scarce for medical students, who assume additional responsibility to their academic duties. This would influence that not all the interested people can complete the training process; consequently, the number of editors joining the journal is reduced. According to data obtained, 85.7% of the editors consider that this training time was not a difficulty to be an editor; however, the time varied from 6 hours to 2 months to complete all courses and certifications.

c. The great academic load

The responsibilities gathered by a university degree are unavoidable, especially in final years. In reference to the culminating stage in the human medicine career, it increases academic and work responsibilities with the patient. Regarding this, 64.2% consider that their academic load is a difficulty within their work as an editor. Furthermore, 50% of editors consider it the main reason for withdrawing from the magazine. In that sense, assuming the responsibility of being an editor can be influenced by the fear of acquiring extracurricular activities that limit time and, consequently, academic performance.

d. Lack of economic stimulus

Only in a few national journals there is a budget to cover the salaries or fees of the editors. In general, the national editor carries out his task for a mere academic and altruistic interest on behalf of his society, academy or institution (10).

In that sense, student publishers take on this extracurricular activity beyond the monetary benefits. This is consistent with the fact that only 14.2% of CIMEL editors indicate that the lack of financial remuneration has negatively influenced their decision to be an editor.

It is worth mentioning that editors are in the process of training, that is, their remuneration implies acquiring experience and ability to function in biomedical journals (11). For this reason, 71.5% consider that the benefits as editor of CIMEL (academics, scholarships, facilities, etc.) are sufficient to compensate for the work performed as an editor.

e. Diffusion difficulties in the calls of editors

The calls to be editors of the magazine are given periodically and constantly; however, difficulties have been detected in this process, which may influence the shortage of publishers.

To begin with, only 28.6% of the editors were aware of the call, through the official CIMEL Facebook page, while 43% of them found out through friends within the magazine. This reflects that the call's publicity is not complying with the expected scope or the target audience, preventing more interested parties from joining the work team. This item can be considered a feedback to the magazine’s management team, as greater importance should be given to advertise work and promote better management of the position.

CONCLUSION

In short, the CIMEL journal is the official organ of scientific dissemination in FELSOCEM and its editorial headquarters are in charge of the Sociedad Científica de San Fernando. Where medical students can assume the editor’s role, an essential role to ensure the correct functioning of the journal, as well as to ensure its quality and visibility; however, the number of editors is not significant, even though the journal is governed by the contribution of all Latin American scientific societies. For this reason, the challenges that students must face to join or remain in the editorial team have been described, where the following stand out: lack of interest in research,
due to the constant preference for the clinical field; lack of training in research and editing by the Faculties of Medicine, since there are still deficiencies in the implementation of courses; the academic load, especially in final years, in which work responsibilities with the patient have increased; lack of economic stimulus, which is rewarded with the acquisition of experience and skills representing its scientific society; Diffusion difficulties in the calls of editors, since the minimum scope of the target audience is not met.

It is expected that, based on all this information, both future efforts and FELSOCEM will take these results into consideration, in order to find effective ways to reduce this problem of publishers shortage and improve the journal general condition.

REFERENCES


Corresponding author:
Gianella Alejandra Arias Aroni
E-mail: Gianellaaa45@gmail.com

Received: 20/04/20
Accepted: 10/06/20