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SOCIÉTÉ FRANÇAISE DE PHLEBOLOGIE

# A report of the "Forum of the Editors" at the "World Congress of the Union Internationale de Phlébologie" (UIP) in Melbourne (7 February 2018).

De Maeseneer M.G.

**This forum started with an overview of the best two papers about phlebological topics, published in 2017 in respectively:**

- "***Phlébologie Annales Vasculaires***" (Albert Claude Benhamou),
- "***European Journal of Vascular and Endovascular Surgery***" (Marianne De Maeseneer),
- "***Phlebology***" (Roshan Bootun, representing Alun Davies),
- "***International Angiology***" (Andrew Nicolaides),
- and "***Journal of Vascular Surgery Venous and Lymphatic Disorders***" (Peter Gloviczki).

**After this introduction, several topics were discussed:**

## Citation Metrics: H-indexes, Impact Factors, Altmetrics. What is important?

***Presented by André van Rij, New Zealand***

When an author has been able to have a paper published, it is interesting to know how good the article is and what colleagues think of it.

***Bibliometrics*** *is the measurement of the performance of research publications.*

- There are quite a number of measures.
- Most simple is to count the number of times the publication has been cited by others.
- If an author has published several papers he/she may not just want to count them and count their citations.
- The author may want to get some measure of how consistently the research work has been recognized.

*One of the most well-known ways to measure the impact is by a* ***citation index****.*

- An example is the ***h-index*** which is the number of publications (n) of a certain author that have been cited at least n times.
- An ***h-index*** of 20 would mean: 20 papers, each cited at least 20 times, which is a very good mid-career score.
- The number of citations is likely to be higher if the journals the author published in have a high ***impact factor***.
- This factor is calculated as follows:

**2017 impact factor = A/B:**

**A** = the number of times that all items published in that journal in 2015 and 2016 were cited by indexed publications during 2017.

**B** = the total number of "citable items" published by that journal in 2015 and 2016 (editorials, invited commentaries, letters to the editor are not considered "citable items").

Citations are more common if the area of research is popular, if the article is in English, if the author has been working for a time in a particular area and is further along in his/her career.

*Other indices have been devised to take some of these factors into account e.g.:*

- Contemporary h-index for only recent publications,
- i10-index for publications having at least 10 citations,
- M-quotient – adjusting for length of career.

*There are also alternative ways in which to evaluate an author's research track record, now called:* ***Altmetrics****.*

- These include how many times publications have been viewed and downloaded, how frequently they have been mentioned in mainstream media and social media, how large is the number of followers, etc.
- These provide greater immediacy.

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– There are numerous groups with readily found websites that can help identify citations, mentions etc. and calculate scores of an individual author.
– Much of this is publicly available and is a rapidly developing approach.
– They are however only numbers or scores that never tell the whole story of the worth of someone's research.

**Why should we bother about citation metrics?**

– The use of metrics is widespread and can be helpful.
– They do give a measure of impact and research quality and productivity.
– Most who publish research are curious about this for themselves and their peers, hopefully providing a "buzz" and a sense of achievement.
– Metrics are important for credibility and recognition, for measuring performance in employer evaluations as well as enhancing research funding opportunities.

For all these reasons metrics deserve our attention.

## What papers do we need and accept in phlebology journals? (e.g. "Journal of Vascular Surgery Venous and Lymphatic Disorders")

***Presented by Peter Gloviczki, USA***

To increase the impact of an article, hence increase citations, first of all it is important to choose the right journal for the author's research.

For an individual author, collaboration may be very interesting, allowing for publication of multidisciplinary or multi-institutional studies.

Different types of publications may be considered, depending on the topic studied.

– Every article type has its own specific requirements and authors should follow certain rules, usually summarized in the "Guide for authors" at the journal's website.
– If authors want to publish a unique case report, they can use the CARE guidelines www.care-statement.org.
– For publication of an observational study the STROBE guidelines can be useful www.strobe-statement.org.
– A further step is to publish analyses of prospectively collected registry data.

Publication of a prospective randomized clinical trial (RCT) will still have more weight. To realize and publish a RCT the CONSORT guidelines should be followed www.consort-statement.org.

A higher level of experience in research and analyses is required for publication of a systematic review or meta-analysis, using the PRISMA guidelines www.prisma-statement.org.

Finally, publications with the highest impact are guidelines (Practice Guidelines, Reporting Standards or Classification), which are highly cited.

***Nowadays, social media such as "LinkedIn", "Facebook" and "Twitter"*** play a more and more important role in spreading the message of scientific publications and this obviously also will influence citation metrics.

## How to not have your paper rejected? Things to consider when submitting a research paper

***Presented by Steve Watson, UK***

The assessment of a research manuscript for publication is based on a system of peer review by experts.

– In most cases, the editor(s)-in-chief of the journal will select an editor to handle the manuscript who will then choose two or three referees who provide a report for the author and a confidential report to the editor.
– In most cases, revision improves the manuscript in terms of clarity and evidence for the conclusions drawn.

There are many things for the author to consider in this process and to help minimise the chance of rejection.

– Too often authors are unrealistic on the significance of their work or too rushed in submitting the manuscript such that it is poorly presented, the work is not of sufficient quality or key experiments are missing.
– There is a wide range of journals and the authors should take their time to choose the right journal.
– The first thing to consider is the significance of the work to the field and to the careers of the authors.

Authors need to be realistic on the significance of the work and to target journals that accept work of a similar level.

It is important for the manuscript to be fairly assessed and ultimately to be read.

It is therefore advisable for authors to study the content of the journal, including the names of editors, to see if their expertise is suitable to judge the work (and justify why it should be published).

Authors should prepare the manuscript in line with the instructions for authors and present the manuscript in a scholarly manner.

Most publishers have writing support services, although these are seldom required.

– Manuscripts that do not comply with the instructions, or are poorly presented, have a significantly lower chance of acceptance.
– Editors and reviewers deserve to the right to focus on the science. The length of the manuscript should be appropriate for the message. As an example, there is a general feeling that it is harder to publish "negative studies". However, this is rarely the case provided that the "negative" conclusion has significance to the field and the manuscript is of the right length and targeted at the right journal.

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– Authors can recommend referees and deselect others on the grounds of conflict etc. This requires careful thought as "colleagues" can provide much harsher reports than might be predicted or reports that are "too positive" to render them meaningless.

It is noteworthy that competitors often provide balanced reports due to their expert knowledge and desire to provide a balanced review for the editor.

*Today, there is an excessive emphasis on the impact factor and the need to be first or senior author. The overall importance of this however is country and researcher-specific.*

– Although preferable to be first or last author, this is neither practical nor always justified, especially with the ever increasing numbers of authors.
– It may even be better to be a middle author on a large paper than a first author on a smaller study.
– Not all research is suitable for high impact journals even though the work itself is still important.
– In this case, a well presented publication in a lower impact factor journal can have a significant impact in a field and help the career of the authors.

## How to review a paper: do's and don'ts from the perspective of an editor

***Presented by Marianne De Maeseneer, Belgium/Netherlands***

*One of the key points to be (or become) a good reviewer is to respect the so-called "law of reciprocity", which means: "do not treat others in a way that you yourself do not want to be treated".*

The system of peer reviewed publications, and, to a wider extent, the whole scientific community, can only exist and survive if experts in the field accept to review manuscripts, so this really is a duty.

Only if a topic does not match the area of expertise, or if the reviewer has a conflict of interest, it is logical to decline doing the review.

Obviously *"I have no time to review"* is a frequently used excuse to decline a review, but, in view of the golden rule of reciprocity, the potential reviewer should reconsider this decision and accept to review, whenever possible.

Of course it is important to be able to meet the deadline, otherwise the reviewer is delaying the process. In exceptional circumstances the editor should always be notified, if the reviewer unexpectedly cannot reach the deadline.

*The reviewer should check for adherence to publication ethics at all times.*

– One of the important elements of this is plagiarism, including self-plagiarism.
– Unfortunately attempts of plagiarism are increasing, mainly under the pressure to publish as much as possible.
– Although most academic publishers offer a *Crossref Similarity Check*, the best system to detect plagiarism is the alertness of the reviewer him/her self, who has the responsibility to notify the editor as quickly as possible.
– Manuscripts are expected to report novel research, so plagiarism is not allowed.

*After checking if the article fits the scope of the journal, the reviewer should carefully address the key components of the article, including the title, abstract, introduction, methods, results and conclusions.*

– It is also important to check whether the limitations of the study have been adequately addressed at the end of the discussion.
– A thorough review of Tables and Figures is crucial as well, they should clearly report and illustrate the content of the study.
– The reviewer should not only limit the review to some general statements, but should clarify what are the flaws of the manuscript and how it can be improved.
– In general, the review process and the subsequent revision of the manuscript by the authors, greatly improves the quality of the article, which is beneficial for both authors and readers.

*Finally, reviewers should always be polite, fair and kind, even if their recommendation to the editor is to reject the manuscript.*

**The most important message for reviewers is that they are there to help the editor and the authors in the first place.**

## Randomised controlled trials in venous disease only tell part of the story

***Presented by Sarah Onida, UK***

*Evidence based medicine* is the practice of employing data from the available literature to aid clinical decision making.

*Randomised controlled trials (RCT)* have classically been considered the gold standard experimental design due to their comparative nature and the focus on bias reduction.

Nonetheless, these come with limitations, particularly with respect to generalisability to the general population, appropriate methodology, length of time for RCT completion and the requirement for significant funding.

Other sources of evidence are represented by *high quality observational studies, patient registries and big data projects.*

It is important to keep in mind these different forms of evidence, when appraising the literature about venous disease and practicing evidence based medicine to the benefit of our patients.

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## When p-values fail to tell the truth

***Presented by Andrew Bradbury, UK***

In an era of "***fake news***" it is not always easy to understand what is really true or not.

In statistical analyses p-values are considered quite essential.

P values evaluate the compatibility of the data with the null hypothesis (that there is no effect or difference).

While a low P value indicates that the study data are unlikely assuming a true null hypothesis, it cannot evaluate whether the null hypothesis is true but the sample was unusual, or whether the null hypothesis is false.

Other factors should be considered, such as the study design and quality, patient selection (inclusion and exclusion criteria), end-points, fairness and precision of measurement, and validity of the underlying assumptions.

*Moreover, readers of scientific articles should always be wary of only reading the abstracts since they may be misleading regarding treatment effects, hence fake news...*

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