

Transparency and editorial process: how do Editors-in-Chief work?

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Most editorials in a scientific journal announce new paths for publication, changes in editorial policies or discuss current topics of interest to the academic community and society as a whole.

In this editorial, we want to show part of the day-to-day work of the Editors-in-Chief of CSP. Questions and curiosity about the internal workings of a scientific journal exist, from the moment an author submits their manuscript, to the evaluation process. We understand that presenting the public – readers and authors – with the course of an article, from submission to publication, as well as some indicators and aspects of the routine of scientific publishing, assigns greater transparency to the editorial process.

The first stage in CSP, as soon as an author submits their manuscript in the System for Article Review and Management (SAGAS; <http://cadernos.ensp.fiocruz.br/csp/>), the editorial secretariat verifies its suitability to the standards, hides all identification of authorship in the text, and generates a file in PDF format. This file is forwarded to the Editors-in-Chief for the initial screening, evaluating whether the article should proceed to peer review or be refused, considering innovation, originality¹, priority themes, and profile of the journal. This process, common to all journals with a large volume of submissions, is usually done within 5 days, allowing authors to submit the article to another journal if they wish.

Since 2015, CSP receives more than 2,000 articles per year, and in 2021, 3,022 manuscripts were submitted to the journal (Figure 1). The proportion of refusals of articles at entrance increased from 67.5% in 2015 to 75.9% in 2021, following the volume of submissions. Submissions significantly increased in 2020, during the initial moment of the COVID-19 pandemic. Between April and August 2020, on fast-track regime², CSP received 644 papers on the subject, of which 54 were published. In our effort to contribute to facing the pandemic, most of the articles refused were given an opinion (Figure 1).

Several factors contribute to the high number of submissions to CSP. Among them, the criteria for evaluating scientific production that assigns too much value to quantity compared with innovation and quality³. Restrictions due to the high publication rates practiced by the main multinational publishers also impose barriers to the dissemination of open access research results^{4,5}. CSP is financed predominantly with public funds from its parent institution and funding agencies, standing out in the national and international

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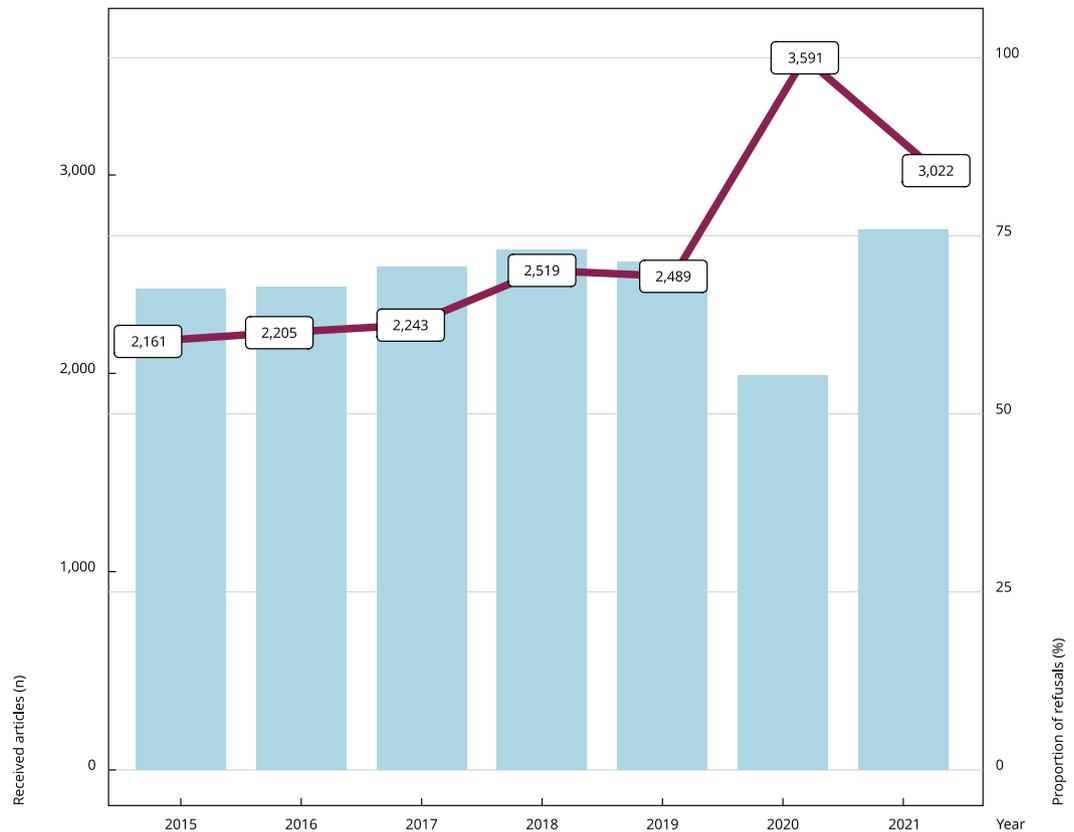
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Figure 1

Number of articles received and the proportion of refusals at entrance in the CSP per year, 2015-2021.



Source: System for Article Review and Management (SAGAS).

scenario as one of the few scientific journals in Public Health that does not charge submission and publication fees for its regular issues.

The peer review stage triggers our 44 Associated Editors, some more related to the article's theme, others more specialized in the method. CSP's Associate Editors are mostly senior researchers from renowned Brazilian institutions from the country's various regions, and some from universities abroad. The Associated Editors appoint reviewers (also named consultants) and follow up the evaluation process of the article in the journal. Any researcher with a PhD is potentially eligible to issue an opinion, respecting the diversity of approaches, objects, and methods from the different disciplinary perspectives that characterize Public Health. Ideally, we recommend three and at least two opinions to make a decision.

Note that in the peer review model currently adopted by the journal, the evaluation is completely anonymous, and the identities are kept from the reviewers and authors who

participate in this process. The dialogue with the author is established between these three actors – Editors-in-Chief, Associate Editors, and consultants.

Note that the article can be submitted to several evaluation rounds and reformulations. The Associated Editors are responsible for checking the various versions and recommending to the Editors-in-Chief a new opportunity, approval, or refusal of the article. The Editors-in-Chief make the final editorial decision based on the joint analysis of the opinions and the evaluation of the Associated Editor in charge. In 2021, of the 729 articles that got to the peer review stage, 26.7% articles were refused with an opinion, 29.8% approved, and 39.2% are still under evaluation and 4.3% were filed for non-response from the authors.

The various stages of an article submitted to CSP, until the final decision, are systematized in a previously published flowchart ⁶. At the end of the process, with the contribution of editors and reviewers, the article is improved. This stage often includes many discussions, in which authors agree or not with the opinions received. A detailed letter systematizes the debate point by point with responses to comments and suggestions from reviewers and editors.

Finally, article accepted! Now to complete the process: standardization of articles to CSP's norms, language review, translation of abstracts, until the approval of the proof by the authors. Each of these steps has its timeframe and the one that refers to obtaining opinions is longest. We have a huge bottleneck in that step, which is a problem that affects scientific journals in general, worldwide and in Brazil.

The responsibility for coordinating all these stages is shared by the Editors-in-Chief, considering the specificities of the article's path in the journal. What else does the Editor-in-Chief do? A lot: from improving the system of submissions (in the changing phase), to choosing the color of the entry page, the theme of the photographs that illustrate our web pages – this year, dedicated to the great popular manifestations worldwide at different political moments. Since 2018 we have also incorporated routine activities related to scientific dissemination structured on three fronts: social networks, press relations and media production, with a video and podcast of the program *Interview with Authors* ⁷.

A clarification: all of us, Associate Editors and Editors-in-Chief, go through the same process without privileges. And we have had articles turned down. We say this with great pride, not as researchers, after all refusals are uncomfortable, but as publishers.

We hope that this brief editorial will allow us to respond to the curiosities and comments raised after the publication of the special episode *How do CSP Editors Work?* (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zWPKKjXGR_k&list=PLjxv_Q_71tpYCzJQpHiyeq-tmEvQVEujA&index=22&t=7s). We also hope this clarifies any questions from authors, reviewers, and journal readers about some aspects that permeate the backstage of scientific publication.

Contributors

All the authors participated in the writing of the text.

Additional informations

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