

The CAPES Qualis and beyond

The eagerly awaited publication of CAPES's evaluation of Brazilian post-graduate courses over the three-year period between 2007 and 2009 has once again raised a pertinent question. To what extent has the attempt to improve the score of courses caused a drop in the demand for publication in Brazilian periodicals? If lower or unimproved scores for some courses are related to the fact that they continued to publish in Brazilian periodicals, this is difficult to tell. Not the least, because various other factors contribute to this evaluation. However, it is worth reflecting a little on this problem and in particular to ask ourselves what measures our periodicals took between 2007 and 2009 or will take in future to confront this challenge.

There was no shortage of complaints and criticisms from the editors of periodicals and their contributors regarding the proposed changes to CAPES's Qualis.

As early as December 2008, shortly after the announcement of the proposal, the *Revista Brasileira de Saúde Materno Infantil* (RBSMI) led the way in expressing its concern that the numbers of articles submitted to Brazilian periodicals might fall off, publishing an editorial entitled "Brazilian Scientific Journals: Publish and Perish?" (*Rev Bras Saúde Matern Infant.* 2008; 8 (1): 361-2).

By replacing the "or" in the cliché with an "and" we were calling attention precisely to the idea that publishing or perishing might become a fruitless endeavor. We do not know whether the courses that received lower scores in 2009 suffered because of this. Neither do we know whether it would be worthwhile investigating the causal connection between the new CAPES Qualis and Brazilian scientific publications.

In January of the following year, our Journal published another editorial entitled "Challenges of the new Qualis to the Brazilian post-graduation and scientific periodism" (*Rev Bras Saúde Matern Infant.* 2009; 9 (1): 9), in which we concluded: "A better understanding of these problems and how to confront them may give rise to answers to our question: How do we meet this challenge?"

The process of facing up to this challenge and searching for a solution produced no shortage of questions and proposals, such as, for instance, the Editorials published by Professor Mauricio Rocha e Silva in *Clinics* in 2009, entitled "O novo Qualis, ou a tragédia anunciada" (*Clinics.* 2009; 64: 1-4) and by Lucena and Tibúrcio in the *RAMB*: "Qualis periódicos: visão do acadêmico na graduação médica" (*Rev Assoc Med Bras.* 2009; 55: 247-8).

We should not neglect to mention the contribution of the *RAMB*, headed by Professor Bruno Caramelli, which threw down the gauntlet in a joint editorial entitled "Change the Qualis Criteria," signed by 53 Brazilian periodicals and also published in *Rev Bras Saúde Matern Infant.* 2010; 10 (2): 145-151. This editorial put forward a number of suggestions as to how to improve the quality of our publications. Obviously, we must also mention the role played by the Brazilian Association of Scientific Editors (ABEC) and its dynamic president, Benedito Barraviera, in obtaining support and understanding from the CAPES and CNPq with regard to the need to resolve the deadlock. There can be no doubt that many periodicals have made every effort to keep up with the new demands and many have found a place in the market. Dozens of periodicals have been indexed by the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI – Thomson Reuters), some of which have been included in *Journal Citation Reports* (JCR), with substantial impact. Other measures have also been taken. A preliminary survey carried out at the end of 2009 by ourselves and the ABEC showed that various periodicals saw a drop in the number of manuscripts received in 2009 compared with 2008, when the new Qualis was to be introduced. We too were affected by this and saw a decline in submissions of around 30% - despite a previous constant increase since the launch of the Journal in 2001.

In an effort not to go under, we immediately adopted two emergency measures. First, we speeded up the processing of manuscripts and, second, put together a newsletter with the addresses of 1,500 potential authors in Brazil and abroad. This newsletter publishes news about the Review and calls for articles. This resulted in an immediate increase in manuscripts received in the following year (2010) of 40% taking us back to the rate of growth we had been experiencing in previous years. This little bit of our recent history reflects the struggle of

scientific periodicals in this country in recent years. We are meeting the challenge and overcoming it.

Finally now, two full years have passed since the introduction of the new Qualis, we have a fuller idea of the effect this change has had on periodicals published in Brazil. A wide ranging study of variations in the flow of manuscripts submitted between 2007 and 2010, based on a representative sample, as suggested at the 6th ABEC Scientific Publishing Seminar in November 2010, will be extremely welcome.

A parallel survey of the initiatives to be taken by each journal, especially new indexing, increasing velocity of publishing and other measures could help to arrive at a more concrete assessment of the situation. Awareness that there is a relation of cause and effect between the position taken by CAPES and CNPq and scientific periodicals will certainly help not only to improve the quality of publications but also to guide the decisions taken by science policy makers in Brazil and the channels through which scientific advances made in the country are divulged. The work in this area undertaken by the ABEC and its affiliated periodicals will doubtless provide a wealth of extremely relevant information.

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