LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Pulmonary rehabilitation: Publication rate of presentations to international congresses: Are the abstracts being published as journal articles?

Publication Rate on Pulmonary Rehabilitation

Dear Editor,

Research project findings have been disclosed more as conference abstracts than as articles in scientific journals.\(^1\)\(^,\)\(^2\) However, conference abstracts aim beyond scientific dissemination to receive peer feedback so that the preparation of the complete manuscript can be refined and published in qualified scientific journals.\(^3\) Publication as an article in a conference abstract appears to be based on the direction of the study results, leading to publication bias.\(^4\) To prevent bias, researchers should be encouraged to publish their results in peer-reviewed scientific journals.\(^5\)

The two largest scientific congresses in the field of pulmonology are held annually: the European Respiratory Society International Congress (ERSc), with approximately 4,000 abstracts accepted annually, and the American Thoracic Society International Conference (ATSc), with almost 7,000 abstracts accepted annually (Fig. 1). In pulmonology, pulmonary rehabilitation is a multidisciplinary field of knowledge that includes physicians and their respiratory allies.

This study aimed to evaluate the publication rate of scientific abstracts presented within the scope of pulmonary rehabilitation and related topics in ERSc and ATSc. Searches for abstracts were conducted during the electronic proceedings of the two conferences held from 2016 to 2018. The search was initially based on titles of abstracts that contained terms within the scope of pulmonary rehabilitation, such as “physical activity”; “physical training”; “exercise”; “exercise training”; “walking”; “physiotherapy”; “physical therapy”; “pulmonary rehabilitation”; “cardiopulmonary rehabilitation”, but not limited to these words. The focus was exclusively on physical exercise, rather than mental or other forms of exercise. Abstracts pertaining to stress testing or physical exercise training were considered relevant. Education and behavioral modifications were considered only if they were related to physical activity or pulmonary rehabilitation. Conversely, educational topics that specifically targeted medication adherence or medical education were deemed ineligible. After screening based on the aforementioned keywords, the full text of the abstracts was read, and studies involving animals, \textit{in vitro} or not related to pulmonary rehabilitation were excluded (Fig. 1).

The remaining abstracts were categorized by presentation type: thematic posters, poster discussions, or oral presentations. The number of authors and country of origin of the corresponding author was recorded. We analyzed the number of abstracts published as full articles until five years after the abstract presentation.

After the abstract screening, full-text articles were searched in the Google Scholar and Medline databases. When a journal article was not found, up to three e-mails were sent to the authors to determine the publication status and obtain a copy of the article if it was published. When the journal article related to the presented abstract was not found, and no response from the author was obtained, it was classified as an “uncertain publication.”\(^6\) If the abstract findings were published in two or more articles, only the article with the highest impact factor (IF) was considered. The following data was extracted from abstracts published as journal articles: name of the journal, IF, data on study design, affiliation, and whether the study result was statistically significant or with a positive direction from their primary outcome analysis.

A total of 964 potentially eligible abstracts were identified, of which 200 (20.7%) were excluded as they were not related to pulmonary rehabilitation, \textit{in vitro}, or animal studies. Seven hundred sixty-four abstracts were analyzed for journal publication rates, with most being thematic posters 419 (54.8%) followed by posters, 276 (36.1%), and oral presentations 69 (9.0%). The median number of authors was six, and most were from the US 143 (18.7%). At the ERSc, the UK had the highest number of presentations 75 (16.4 %), while the US had the highest number of presentations at the ATSc.

The authors responded to e-mails regarding full-text publications after presenting the abstracts in 41.9% of the contacts. Among the authors who responded, the reasons for not publishing the studies in an article format were: not having funding; author lack of time; abandonment by the first author; interruption of research carried out by their students; lack of budget; authors assumed that their findings were not relevant; authors started another more interesting project; retirement; lack of control group; small sample;

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https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pulmoe.2023.06.003
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received a negative peer review and were rewriting to submit to another journal, and published as a book chapter or thesis. In 22 (4.0%) abstracts, the author’s e-mail contacts could not be found. In 322 (42%) abstracts, no journal article was found related to the study and no response was obtained from the author, which was classified as “uncertain publication”.

A total of 323 published articles related to pulmonary rehabilitation abstracts were identified, resulting in a publication rate of 42.3%. A flowchart of the study is presented in Fig. 1. Categorization by mode of presentation proportionally showed that 46 (66.7%) oral presentations, 128 (46.4%) poster discussions, and 149 (35.5%) thematic posters were published as articles. The median IF of the journals is 3.4

Figure 1 Flow diagram of search strategy.
In this study, research... in data acquisition, article writing, and final approval of the submitted version.

Conflicts of interest

All authors declare no conflicts of interest.

References


G. da Silva Gonçalves\textsuperscript{a}, E.F. Timotéo\textsuperscript{a}, D.F. da Silva\textsuperscript{a}, M.J.X. Ribeiro\textsuperscript{b}, T.M.D. Oliveira\textsuperscript{c,d}, A. José\textsuperscript{e}, C.C. Oliveira\textsuperscript{a,c}, C. Malaguti\textsuperscript{a,d,*}

\textsuperscript{a}Postgraduate Research Program on Rehabilitation Sciences, Federal University of Juiz de Fora, Juiz de Fora, MG, Brazil
\textsuperscript{b}School of Medicine, Federal University of Juiz de Fora, Juiz de Fora, MG, Brazil
\textsuperscript{c}PostGraduate Program in Rehabilitation Sciences, School of Physical Education, Physical Therapy and Occupational Therapy, Federal University of Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, Brazil
\textsuperscript{d}PostGraduate Program in Health, Federal University of Juiz de Fora, Juiz de Fora, MG, Brazil
\textsuperscript{e}Corresponding author at: Faculdade de Fisioterapia da Universidade Federal de Juiz de Fora, Av. Eugênio do Nascimento, Dom Bosco, Juiz de Fora, MG, Brazil.

E-mail address: carlamalaguti@gmail.com (C. Malaguti).

Received 28 January 2023; Accepted 16 June 2023
Available online 16 July 2023

Sources of support

The authors E.F.T., D.F.S., A.J., C.C.O., and CM are funded by the Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES): Code 001- Research Support Program. GSG received a scholarship from the Universidade Federal de Juiz de Fora. CM received funding from the Fundação de Amparo a Pesquisa de Minas Gerais (FAPEMIG; Grant # APQ-03054-17).

Authors’ contribution

C.M., C.C.O., A.J., and T.M.D.O. participated in the conception and design of the study, data analysis, and interpretation, critical review of relevant intellectual content, and final approval of the manuscript to be submitted. G.S.G., E.F.T., D.F.S., and M.J.X.R. were involved in data acquisition, article writing, and final approval of the submitted version.