

Dear Editor:

During my years of scientific work in Colombia, I have faced administrative difficulties which deserve comments to help improve these situations. Although the whole procedure of doing science in our country is a greater challenge than in the developed world, I would like to highlight some specific points where I feel we can take some measures to help our work.

i) The very slow editorial processes of the journals.

This is actually a problem shared by other countries in the region; however, our journals call my attention given the very slow and cumbersome process of revising and publishing a manuscript. This is, I feel, a problem for the whole scientific community in the country, which involves a journal editor and goes through the referees and the authors of the manuscripts. Table 1 illustrates how serious the problem is; it shows the mean number of days for accepting and publishing original papers and reviews papers that appeared in three biomedical journals category A (according to Publindex, by Colciencias [www.colciencias.gov.co](http://www.colciencias.gov.co)) in Colombia during the past two years, compared to the time taken for the same procedures in three international biomedical journals, matched by topic with the Colombian ones and also ranked A according to the homologation issued by Colciencias. Our journals published 214 papers during the last two years, with a mean of 214 days for a paper to be accepted and 334 days for it to be published. These numbers are far above those found for international journals in which a manuscript takes only 137 days to be accepted and

229 days to be published (n=205). Moreover, the international journals published online versions of the accepted papers up to 6 months in advance of the printed publication. Our delays affect the visibility and impact of our research, and because the speed of publication is an important issue for authors when choosing a journal to submit manuscripts, our numbers deter potential international authors. I would like to suggest some measures that can be taken to improve our numbers: to include as a criteria for the classification of the journals an index of the speed of manuscript publication; to improve process management with the help of specialized softwares; to publish the times taken by the referees to evaluate the works, for instance in the section devoted to listing their names as used by some journals; to conduct pedagogy on the importance of timely revision of a manuscript for a colleague; to create precise short forms to be filled out by the referees; to unify the instructions to authors for all the journals in a given field; to increase the database of reviewers for the journals with national and international scientists; to pay for the evaluation depending on the time taken by the reviewer; to include a strict deadline for the authors to send back a corrected version of a revised manuscript; to move from printed, more expensive journals, to online, cheaper journals, as a means of increasing the number of pages per issue.

ii) The poor presence of Colombian journals in top databases. Only a few journals are included in Medline and Scielo; moreover, there use to be great delays between the appearance of an issue in our country and its inclusion in the database web page, which in my experience can be as much as 6 months.

**Table 1**  
**Time for a paper to be accepted and published in some colombian and international journals**

	Colombian journals			International journals		
	n <sup>a</sup>	Accepted <sup>b</sup>	Published <sup>b</sup>	n <sup>c</sup>	Accepted <sup>b</sup>	Published <sup>b</sup>
Research papers	169	233.8±10.5	341.2±9.2	202	137.3±4.3*	230.1±6.6*
Review papers	45	137.2±13.3	306.2±18	3	95±39.6	142.3±57.4*
Total	214	213.5±9.2	333.8±8.2	205	136.7±4.3*	228.8±6.6*

a. Number of papers published during 2009 and 2010. b. Days to be accepted and to appear published (values are mean±error of the mean). c. Papers published during 2010. \*p<0.001, compared to Colombian journals.

Currently, the Colombian journals previously evaluated accounted for a total of a 7-issue delay in appearing in international databases. On the contrary, the international journals have the *In Press* papers already included in databases (ahead of print). This goes against the visibility and impact of the works published in Colombia. Some ideas to improve would be: to increase the quality of our research and manuscript writing; to increase the number of articles written in English; to pay attention to the timely appearance of the papers in the databases, both by the editors and the authors.

- iii) Substantial delays by governmental institutions regarding the updating of journal classifications. Publindex and the homologation of international journals use to have a 6- to 12-month delay. This fact further slows the *per se* slow process, carried out by the universities, of recognizing points assigned from papers to the authors. Some helpful measures can be: to extend the period for a journal to stay in a given category, for instance, from one to three years; to implement the use of softwares by the universities to recognize points to the authors.
- iv) The long time it takes for an idea to become an experiment or a result. If researchers want to test some hypotheses, even in a preliminary manner, they have to write and fill out a great deal of forms and submit them to very slow evaluation processes to secure funding. Notable delays by funding agencies are common. If the money is obtained, then researchers have to wait for equipment or chemicals

to arrive. The whole procedure can take more than a year, without including the time to have a graduate student, which can be of up to three months once the project is funded. This problem extends to the idea of funding projects in which a limited amount and definitive-like conception of experiments is described; however, research does not work this way, in fact, the need for many reagents, experiments, etc., appear along the way. Improvement of this situation includes increasing efficiency throughout the system of funding projects, importing chemicals and equipment, and doing science in the country.

- v) The long time needed for an idea to become a point in the productivity curriculum. According to what I have described above, it can take from 4 to 5 years to transform a research idea into a point of productivity derived from a paper.

Because all the steps mentioned involve scientists, I feel that it is our responsibility and opportunity to improve the administrative processes that hinder our own work. It depends on all those working in the field to improve science in the country and make it more expeditious, visible, and important.

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