

# Current Challenges in Scientific Publishing in Health: A Perspective from the South

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When we took on the role of editors three years ago, the world was a different place. This is not a cliché - it was really different. We were still living through the most uncertain stages of the pandemic, generative artificial intelligence had not yet reached widespread and open use, and although discussions about scientific integrity were present, they did not occupy the center of public or editorial debate. In this short period, the landscape has changed completely, compelling us to revise our practices, standards, and ethical expectations.

Editing a scientific journal in Latin America also entails a series of specific challenges. We are not part of the traditional editorial centers, nor do we hold dominant positions in global indexing circuits or in the rankings that often shape what is considered “valid” knowledge. We view this not as a weakness but rather as an opportunity: it compels us to take on an ethical, political, and epistemic responsibility in how we produce and disseminate science from our region. In what follows, we briefly examine three key situations shaping our current editorial horizon.

## Scientific Fraud and Crisis of Trust

One of the most pressing issues is that of scientific fraud. Although the most high-profile cases tend to come from institutions in the Global North, the effects of these episodes impact the entire scientific community, regardless of geographical location. The problem lies not only in the harm caused by an isolated case of fraud but also in the progressive erosion of public trust in science. In Latin America, where the legitimacy of scientific institutions is more fragile and resources allocated to research are scarce, this symbolic damage can be even more profound.

We believe it is essential not to encourage a productivist logic –driven by rankings, metrics, and competition– that ultimately fosters environments where fraud can thrive: pressure to publish, lack of rigorous peer review, and the automatic reproduction of papers without

real contribution. Editors have a responsibility to break away from that logic, at least partially, by prioritizing quality over quantity and fostering a shared sense of responsibility with authors.

A paradigmatic case for reflecting on the limits of editorial validation was that of physicist Alan Sokal, who, in 1996, successfully submitted a deliberately incoherent and pseudoscientific article to a cultural studies journal as an experiment aimed at critiquing academic relativism. While not a case of fraud in the conventional sense, the episode –known as the “Sokal affair”– brutally exposed the blind spots of some editorial systems and remains a key reference in debates about integrity and rigor in scientific publishing.

## Artificial intelligence: opportunity, threat, symptom

The emergence of generative artificial intelligence tools has rapidly transformed the way we write, review, and evaluate scientific texts. The possibility of producing well-written manuscripts –though lacking originality or evidence– poses a new challenge. How can we verify the actual authorship of a text? What role do creativity, ethics, and intent play in a work produced or edited by algorithms?

The issue is not about rejecting AI but about establishing transparent and ethical frameworks for its use: disclosing the use of generative models, identifying their influence on the content, and clearly distinguishing between technical assistance and intellectual authorship. In Latin America, the risk is twofold: being excluded from technological development and becoming passive users of systems that replicate perspectives disconnected from our clinical, epidemiological, and social realities.

## The Need for a New Editorial Pact

In light of these scenarios, we believe it is urgent to rethink the role of scientific journals. It is no longer

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enough to be filters of technical quality. We need to be spaces for critical thinking, situated knowledge production, and collective conversation. In this sense, editing also means caring: caring for language, caring for truthfulness, and caring for the connection with the readership.

From the South, this care becomes even more essential, as it is crucial to address local problems through theoretical frameworks focused on regional epistemologies. Publishing from here involves validating other methodologies, different ways of narrating clinical practice, and alternative approaches to evidence. This must also be reflected in our editorial policies.

### **Conclusion: Editing as a Political and Clinical Act**

Editing scientific content today is a political act. And doing so from Latin America is also a form of resistance: against data extractivism, against epistemic homogenization, and against the erasure of the singular. Artificial intelligence, fraud, and unequal access to publishing are not merely technical issues. They are ethical dilemmas. And we must face them with discernment, but also with imagination, critical thinking, and a strong commitment to our communities.

If there is one thing we have learned over these past three years, it is that scientific editing is not just a technical or academic task. Above all, it is a way of being in the world. And in this world –so different from that of just three years ago– that way of being calls for resolve, care, and a clear ethical stance.

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