

The future of *Acta Gastro-Enterologica Belgica*

N. Lanthier^{1,2}, T. G. Moreels^{1,3}

(1) Service d'Hépatogastroentérologie, Cliniques universitaires Saint-Luc, Université catholique de Louvain, Brussels, Belgium ; (2) Société Royale Belge de Gastro-Entérologie ; (3) Vlaamse Vereniging voor Gastro-Enterologie

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Recently, public availability of medical manuscripts free of charge was subject to a national discussion, pledging for obligatory open access journals (1). The idea is based upon the fact that many researches in medical sciences are (partially) funded by the government, and thus by tax payers. Therefore, all tax payers should have free access to the published results. However, the traditional publishing model is based on authors submitting their research results free of charge to a medical journal, and when accepted and published, only subscribers to the journal are allowed access to its content. Commercial publishers are thus financed by the subscribers (libraries and individuals) to their journals and by selling publicity of pharmaceutical companies. Because of the high subscription rates more and more publishers embarked on the open access model, also known as the author-pays model (2). The principle of open access journals requires authors to pay for the publication of their accepted manuscript, which then becomes freely available to the world. It is currently unclear which of the two financial models is more profitable for the publishers. However, the number of open access journals is steadily increasing with new releases on a weekly base. And all these journals need manuscripts (and publication fees) to financially survive. So, the open access model has led to the danger of predatory publishing with questionable journal integrity and problematic peer review process (3).

We are overwhelmed by medical publications, daily calls by new journals inviting us to submit our "unpublished results", numerous possibilities to participate to symposiums, scientific congresses and the rapidly evolving digitalization of medical science. The current question in this context is: where does *Acta Gastro-Enterologica Belgica* stand and where will it go?

First, we are living an exciting medical era and in particular in gastroenterology and hepatology, with emerging diagnostic and therapeutic progress, leading to clinical breakthroughs and gamechangers. In hepatology, new and very effective drugs against hepatitis C are now available, which absolutely transform the spectrum of chronic liver diseases. Many studies are performed in the field of fibrosing nonalcoholic steatohepatitis with promising new therapeutic options. Significant progress also occurs in the care of patients with inflammatory

bowel diseases or digestive cancers opening the door to a more patient-tailored and cost-effective treatment. So medical reporting remains of the utmost importance under the form of original manuscripts, high quality reviews, guidelines, etc...

Second, in this context, we live in a small but well-developed country with high quality medical care and with internationally recognized gastroenterology and hepatology teams. We have a lot of very active scientific committees such as the Belgian Inflammatory Bowel Disease Research and Development (BIRD) group, the Belgian Association for the Study of the Liver (BASL), the Belgian Group for Digestive Oncology (BGDO), the Belgian Society of Gastrointestinal Endoscopy (BSGIE)... but only one national journal: *Acta Gastro-Enterologica Belgica*. Our journal is the link between two main professional societies: the Société Royale Belge de Gastro-Entérologie (SRBGE) and the Vlaamse Vereniging voor Gastro-Enterologie (VVGE). Its management is entrusted to two representatives (one for each society) for the functions of Editor-in-Chief and Deputy Editor respectively, in 2-years terms (4). The roles of Associate Editors are given to scientific representatives coming from each scientific society. The long history of *Acta Gastro-Enterologica Belgica* goes back to 1933 (4). Over the many years the journal has obtained a dominant position to publish manuscripts ranging from Belgian national guidelines and position statements to original manuscripts and exceptional case reports. As shown in the current issue, the journal represents thus an important forum for scientific collaborations in Belgium, clinical research results from trainees and medical students, reviews from invited speakers to our national meetings, and viewpoints from eminent colleagues on a particular Belgian medical problem (5-6). The success and scientific quality of *Acta Gastro-Enterologica Belgica* also appeal to the international medical community with nowadays over 85% of submitted manuscripts from outside Belgium.

Third, as mentioned last year when we pointed to the role of the publications in the career of a scientist or a medical doctor, it is important to provide the possibility

Correspondence to : Prof. Nicolas Lanthier, Service d'Hépatogastroentérologie, Cliniques universitaires Saint-Luc, Université catholique de Louvain, Avenue Hippocrate, 10, 1200 Brussels, Belgium. Phone: 00.32.2.764.28.23. Fax: 00.32.2.764.53.46
E-mail : nicolas.lanthier@uclouvain.be

to our trainees to publish research results with good visibility (7-8). *Acta Gastro-Enterologica Belgica* allows our students and trainees to write interesting case reports, results of clinical research or a review on an important clinical topic. To empower our commitment to the Belgian gastroenterology and hepatology community, this journal rewards each year the best original manuscript publication during the award ceremony of the Belgian Week of Gastroenterology. Additionally, trainees are also given the opportunity to help to review the many manuscripts submitted to *Acta Gastro-Enterologica Belgica* under close supervision of the editorial board. This process teaches them to look critically to the reporting of clinical research results, which represents an essential part of their training. With our journal reviewed mainly by Belgian collaborators, indexed in PubMed and a stable Impact Factor, we take part in the training of our students and trainees, focusing on the scientific background.

Finally, in a world ruled by the internet, we do think it is important to maintain the paper version of *Acta Gastro-Enterologica Belgica*, allowing traditional and relaxed reading of its quality printed content. The paper version also ensures a good visibility in the ever-growing forest of online journals, imposed to us through numerous daily and sometimes aggressive emails. *Acta Gastro-Enterologica Belgica* has a long tradition as a classical medical journal with 4 printed issues per year (4).

However, looking back helps us to foresee and to face the future. All the points raised above are important to us, but new issues need to be considered to keep our journal attractive, qualitative and visible. In the web-connected world, it is important to renovate and secure our website, both for the presentation and accessibility of published manuscripts but also for a practical point of view for the submitters, reviewers and editors. As illustrated above, we are facing the many challenges of the open access publishing model and they will be evaluated in the future. *Acta Gastro-Enterologica Belgica* in its current form is independent, financially healthy and will

probably maintain the traditional publishing model in the upcoming years. With all these considerations, we think it is important not only to defend our journal but also to be proud of it, and to continue to improve it, in order to be able to pass along the treasure to our editorial successors. We therefore take the opportunity to thank all the people who voluntarily devote their time to *Acta Gastro-Enterologica Belgica*. In particular the Associate Editors and reviewers, who work in the shade, unpaid and during their free time. Their valuable effort is of high quality and highly appreciated. And finally, the editorial office run by Mia Persoons for over 10 years now represents a reliable and loyal backbone of the journal...

On behalf of the Editorial Board of *Acta Gastro-Enterologica Belgica*, we wish you above all a beautiful year 2019 !

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest regarding this manuscript.

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