

EDITORIAL

Actas Celebrates its 100th Birthday

When a scientific journal reaches its 100th birthday, it is an important event. When the journal in question is ours, all Spanish dermatologists should feel proud and full of admiration because the journal survived, miraculously, so many difficulties of so many kinds. *Actas* never ceased to publish, even during the Spanish Civil War of 1936-39. Those who were born about then will remember that by 1980 the journal was as much as 2 years behind schedule, which led to its being dropped from Index Medicus. At that time, 2 new journals appeared: *Dermatología Española* and *Gaceta Dermatológica*, which never managed to take its place. Overcoming these and other difficulties increases the sense of triumph on completing our first 100 years.

Two groups of people have played important roles in the life of *Actas*: the authors who have contributed their manuscripts to the journal, and those whose job it was to plan, edit, and improve each successive issue. Both of us have contributed in both ways to the history of *Actas*, and for this reason we accepted without a moment's hesitation the invitation of the journal's current director, Professor Daudén, to write a short article for this commemoration. We have both built a good deal, if not the greater part, of our careers in the pages of *Actas*^{1,2} and for 8 years (1994-2002) we both held senior editorial positions at the journal. As is evident in the first paragraph of the following article, circumstances were such that one of us commented on those 8 years of work in a much-deserved though sad tribute to our late colleague and friend Professor Adolfo Aliaga, which took place on 15 November 2003. For this reason, we felt that the best way to discuss our work at *Actas* during those years was to publish the text of that talk.

A Tribute to Professor Aliaga

Eight Years at the Helm of *Actas Dermosifiliográficas*: Experiences and Reflections

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It is customary that when a new director takes charge of a journal, the outgoing director publishes a note of farewell in the journal. When I left the position of director of *Actas* a year and a half ago, I thought I would do the same, but

circumstances conspired to delay the project until it was no longer appropriate. For this reason, it seems to me that this tribute to Professor Aliaga is a good opportunity to amend this failure; all the more so because the dermatologists at the Hospital General de Valencia constituted one of the groups that submitted the greatest number of manuscripts to *Actas* during those years.

Nine years ago, Professor Camacho proposed me for the position of director of *Actas*, and I accepted immediately even though I knew that this would seriously affect my own scientific productivity, as was in fact the case. But I was eager to prove that it was possible to publish a high-quality Spanish journal of dermatology. Still, like some of you, I wondered whether it was really worth publishing a Spanish-language journal when the market was totally saturated with English-language journals. (Dr. Requena, in an internet search 4 years ago, located 35 English-language dermatology journals in the United States, Europe, and Japan alone.)

I expressed this concern in 1998 in a letter to the editor of *Medicina Cutánea*.³ Oddly enough, not long afterwards I received a letter from Professor Grosshans, the director of the French journal *Annales de Dermatologie et Vénérologie*, asking for permission to publish a translation of my letter in his journal.⁴ If France, with an extraordinary tradition of dermatology that is light-years ahead of Spain's, was finding that scientific work published in French had a limited audience, what could we possibly hope to accomplish?

*"Should we continue publishing medical journals in Spanish?"*³

Following a series of considerations that time constraints will not allow me to repeat here, I answered this question in the following way:

*"In my opinion, a medical journal in a language other than English makes sense only if, in addition to publishing essential and world-class medical knowledge, it also serves as a reference point for the scientific tradition of its own country and, even better, its own language."*³

What motivated that letter was the publication in *Medicina Cutánea* of an article in which the only references cited were in English, when a cursory search easily located 7 articles on the subject in *Actas*, 1 in *Medicina Cutánea*, and another in *Piel*.

With this in mind, one of the principal goals that Dr. Requena and I set ourselves was to try to ensure that all

articles cited Spanish sources. In this effort, the assistance of Dr. Conde-Salazar, who compiled a database of all dermatology articles published in Spanish journals since 1909, was decisive. Spanish dermatology will be forever in his debt.

A recent example of this failure of self-respect is the publication in the most recent issue of *Actas* of a review article on Mohs micrographic surgery. Among the 125 citations, a review article on this same subject published in the same journal 5 years earlier is not included.

Once we decided, however, that we should in fact continue to publish scientific journals in Spanish, even at a certain disadvantage, we had to address the next question: what should these publications look like?

Given this avalanche of scientific literature that leaves us no time to read even the tables of contents of the journals, much less the articles, we thought it was essential to put ourselves in the reader's position and make it as easy as possible. How did we do this?

1. We placed the table of contents on the front cover, so that no one would have the excuse that it was too much effort to turn the page.
2. We instituted structured abstracts so that it was sufficient to read the last paragraph.

One of the main problems we faced was that Spanish dermatologists, with very few exceptions, have no idea how to write an abstract. I myself wrote more than half of the abstracts for the approximately 1000 articles published during those 8 years, and made substantial changes in 400 of the remaining 500 abstracts.

Today the most important part of a scientific article is the last paragraph of the abstract, because it contains the conclusions. If an article contributes nothing new, why read it? And if it does say something new, this has to be expressed in 2 or 3 lines. I have heard it said, and I believe it, that Einstein summed up the theory of relativity on a single side of a quarter-sheet of paper.

In view of this, the abstracts of the articles we published were generally structured in the following way:

"We present a case of...and discuss the results."

Another goal we set for ourselves was to provide a service to our readers; that is, to make the journal a social as well as a scientific forum, so that whenever anyone wanted to know what courses, meetings, or conferences

"A scientific literature that no one cites is a nonexistent literature; if others do not cite us, and we do not cite ourselves, who are we writing for?"^{3*}

Subsequently, in a detailed review of the references cited in articles published in *Actas*, the authors concluded: "minimal citation of the national literature in general, and of our own journal in particular, should alert authors to the problem and encourage them to make use of sources published in Spain."⁵

were being held that month or year, all they had to do was to consult the Agenda and Convocations section of *Actas*. In order for this to work, however, we had to make sure that the journal was published on schedule every month. This entailed an ongoing struggle with the publisher in which we were nearly always successful.

I don't want to bore you, and to set an example of brevity for those who will speak after me in this much deserved tribute to the memory of our esteemed Adolfo, I will end with a little anecdote. It had always struck me as odd that whenever I sent a manuscript to a journal, let's say *Piel*, with 2 photographs of the same size, the vertical one was always published 3 times larger than the horizontal one. I thought this was a technical issue having to do with not exceeding the width of the column of text. When I first contacted the publishers of *Actas* about this, they told me that it was no problem to publish the photographs in any size we wanted: half a column, a column and a half, between 2 columns, etc.

We decided to publish the photos retaining the proportions of the originals we received; that is, if the vertical photo was the width of the column, the horizontal photo occupied a column and a half, and we reserved the other half for the caption. As it turns out, this way of publishing photographs has a technical name in typography; it's called a "banner".

When, on other occasions, we decided to use the entire width of the column for a horizontal photo, we used the same dimensions for the vertical photo, which did not fill the entire space of the column. Eventually we adopted this procedure as a general rule because the illustration most closely resembled the real size of the photograph. Enlargements always result in loss of quality and we thought a smaller, clearer photo was better than a larger but lower-quality picture.

If we contributed in some way to improving *Actas*, today we are fortunate to celebrate the accomplishments of the 2 editorial teams that succeeded us under the leadership of Professors Fernández Herrera and Daudén, respectively. In comparison to their achievements, ours are minor. The former is responsible for the return, after more than 20 years of exile, of *Actas* to Index Medicus/MEDLINE, and thanks to the latter, every issue of the journal is now published in PubMed in English translation.

Conclusion: we are pleased with *Actas*. Just one small "but": those touches of blue... But colors are a matter of taste.

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