

No doubt it would be desirable that dermatologists make every effort to get their communications published. As Chesterton wrote 100 years ago: "If the idea does not seek to be the word, the chances are that it is an evil idea. If the word is not made flesh it is a bad word." The idea converted into "word" is scientific communication and the word made "flesh" is the act of publishing. However, it is not that simple. Scientific publication is a reserved space, subject to many difficulties and to a different context than a congress and other forums of scientific knowledge and medical communication such as the web pages, refresher courses, databases, and meetings of working groups. Each one has its function and they are not comparable.<sup>5</sup>

In conclusion, we believe that it is very important not to confuse these types of scientific forum. While they may all be related to a certain extent, they should not be mixed. After all, not all scientific knowledge needs to be published.

## References

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## Response

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*To the Editor:*

We welcome the comments, suggestions, and contributions of Dr. Belloch-Mas concerning our article "Assessment of Scientific Impact of Communications Presented at Spanish National Dermatology and Venereology Congresses from 2000 Through 2003" published recently in this journal.

And we concede that, in the design of the study, we encountered many of the points that Dr. Betlloch-Mas has raised in her letter. Obviously, within the aims of all Spanish dermatology congresses, a fundamental aspect should be the provision of continued training, both for practicing specialists and those in training. We fully agree that a Spanish congress should include, within its objectives, the dissemination and exchange of knowledge, facilitate learning and the initiation of scientists in the communication of their ideas, act as a meeting point for participants, and help stimulate better daily health care and research activities. Likewise, interaction between delegates should be promoted and the congress should be a forum for sharing personal, occupational, scientific, and teaching experiences.

We believe that the current structure and different activities in national dermatology congresses (symposia, workshops, pre-congress courses, official topics, meetings of different working parties, social activities, etc), allow these goals to be reached without too much difficulty. As Dr. Betlloch-Mas points out, there is no single final end user of a national dermatology congress; rather the congress should be structured to cater to the expectations and hopes of a heterogeneous group that includes both dermatology specialists and physicians in training (with different professional practices, priorities, and interests).

However, the essential objective of our study was to assess, in as objective a manner as possible, the scientific quality of the different communications presented in the Spanish national dermatology congress over a 4 year period. At the same time, we tried to compare the results obtained with data published previously in the literature concerning national and international congresses. We believe that this variable can be considered to be independent of the others mentioned above (continuous professional development, exchange of ideas, meeting points, etc).

The ultimate objective of any national congress of a specialty is to attain excellence in each and every one of the aspects mentioned above and, at the same time, faithfully represent the scientific quality of the specialty in the national arena as these are national congresses. Although the publication index of the communications presented in a congress is a good marker of its scientific impact, it seems unthinkable to consider restricting communications according to how likely they are to be published. However, given the low publication index observed in our study, we should perhaps reflect on whether it is reasonable to systematically accept communications without any prior selection criteria.

At no point have we considered or proposed changing the focus of the structure of the congress; we only aimed

to provide additional data on a specific point concerning the scientific quality of the Spanish national dermatology congress. Ideally, knowledge of these aspects should be an additional parameter to assess in the design and structure of future national congresses with a view to attaining the highest possible quality.

## References

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