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How to manage the abundant COVID-19 submissions to a peer-reviewed Scientific Journal

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In January 2020, both authors became Editors of the peer-reviewed European Journal of Clinical Investigation (EJCI). After one year, we feel it is time for a first balance of our activities. The COVID-19 pandemic deeply impacted not only on the editorial work, but also in all our professional and private lives. As Medical Doctors, every day we were involved in patients' care during this pandemic. As new Scientific Editors, we not only received a huge amount of COVID-19-related submissions (N=195), but also non-COVID-19 submissions increased tremendously (N=1101). It was quite challenging to edit this abundant number of articles that was submitted to our Journal (more than double in 2020 as compared to 2019). Table 1 shows that the new editorial board excellently succeeded in handling all those submissions expediently. Despite the doubling of the number of submissions, the handling times in 2020 decreased tremendously as compared with the previous year. This holds not only for the median time to first decision (for all submissions 2020 versus 2019, respectively 8 versus 10 days) but especially for the median time to final decision after external review (for all submissions 2020 versus 2019, respectively 52 versus 118 days). There was a lower proportion of original and a higher proportion of letters/editorials/commentaries/perspectives type of submissions related to COVID-19 as compared to non-COVID-19. The handling time differs not that much between COVID-19 and non COVID-19 related submissions in 2020, illustrating that sufficient time was devoted in the judgement of COVID-19 submissions as well. The accept ratio was also not different between COVID-19 and not COVID-19 related submissions. In fact we had to prioritize de-novo non-COVID submissions with similar scientific relevance against COVID-19 submissions regarding key expert opinions and new experimental treatments [1-5]. The tumultuous COVID-19 submissions were often less accurately written by authors maybe because of a shortage of preparation time. We also observed that validated scientific methods acknowledged since many decades were often reversed. Our aim was to judge all submissions including the short-term COVID-19 experiments in an appropriate way, resulting sometimes in multiple rounds of revisions. Fortunately, authors inclined at publishing in a fast track mode, thereby completing the revisions conveniently. So, despite these extra revisions we were able to take a final decisions on time. We finally decided to compose a COVID-19 Special Issue, highlighting together the clinical and translational knowledge established from European countries firstly affected by the pandemic, such as Italy. The goal of the Special Issue was to share relevant information potentially helpful to other countries affected in a later stage or to fight the next COVID-19 waves [6-8]. Our conclusion is that after one year, we still have big scientific gaps on the COVID-19 pandemic and

we often do not know how to manage patients suffering from COVID-19 with multiple comorbidities. Several unmet needs remain to be addressed and our Journal is widely open to all scientific contributions clarifying these issues. In the meantime, considering the non-COVID scientific production of EJCI, we attempted at highlighting new ESC guidelines in cardiovascular diseases, with the contribution of key Opinion Leaders [9-11]. Finally, we attempted at increasing the acceptance of basic research submissions, with particular interest for both cancer and cardiovascular domains. We are in debt with Reviewers, Editorial Office, Deputy Editors and Section Editors for their great work for the Journal. We acknowledge at the End of this Editorial and on the website of EJCI (<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/13652362>) the full list of colleagues who served as a reviewer for EJCI in 2020. We are very grateful of their critical support and useful comments. Facing the pandemic with its complexities in 2020, we better learned to teach, meet and manage scientific issues and collaborations from a remote mode. In retrospect we are more than satisfied with the enormous amount of work that had been done by our editorial board in 2020. We wish to our readers and collaborators a healthy future with hopefully some onsite meetings in the second half of 2021. Please, keep in mind that EJCI is a scientific space open to your commentaries, controversies, ideas and original research. Do not forget to submit your precious work to EJCI in order to improve knowledge and patient care!

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Table 1.

| Year of submission | 2020 (N=1296) | | | | | | 2019 (N=607) | | |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|--------------|-------------------------|---------------------|--------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|--------------|-------------------------|
| Subject | Covid-19 | | | Non Covid-19 | | | Non Covid-19 (All) | | |
| Manuscript type | Number (%) | Accept ratio | Turnaround time* (days) | Number | Accept ratio | Turnaround time* (days) | Number | Accept ratio | Turnaround time* (days) |
| Original | 118 (60) | 0.16 | NA | 886 (80) | 0.14 | NA | 506 (83) | 0.12 | NA |
| Review | 22 (11) | 0.31 | NA | 116 (11) | 0.32 | NA | 50 (8) | 0.18 | NA |
| Editorial/perspective/commentary | 19 (10) | 0.52 | NA | 39 (4) | 0.51 | NA | 34 (6) | 0.50 | NA |
| Letter | 31 (16) | 0.16 | NA | 48 (4) | 0.45 | NA | 12 (2) | 0.76 | NA |
| other | 5 (3) | 0.00 | NA | 12 (1) | 0.33 | NA | 5 (1) | 0.60 | NA |
| Total | 195 | 0.21 | 6 versus 39 | 1101 | 0.19 | 8 versus 54 | 607 | 0.15 | 10 versus 118 |

Legend table 1

Submissions of manuscripts to EJCI from the first year of the new editorial board 2020 as compared to the previous year 2019.

The submissions from 2020 are also depicted as covid-19 or not covid-19 related.

*Median turnaround times to first decision versus final decision after external review.