

HOW TO RESUSCITATE THE LANGUISHING CLINICAL RESEARCH IN DENTAL IMPLANTOLOGY?

My personal impression is that over recent years, the quality of clinical research in implantology has deteriorated. According to my naïve predictions, this should have not happened. On the contrary, I had imagined, or at least hoped for, some improvement. So what went wrong?

I think that there are multiple factors that have caused this situation, and I will try to discuss some of them here. I would like to start with the issues related to ethics committees. There can be vast differences among European countries, and sometimes even within the same country, in the likelihood of the same research protocol being approved. Some countries are, in my view, over-restrictive and slow (for instance France and the UK), while others are more pragmatic and predictable (for instance Switzerland, Germany and Scandinavia) and some are wildly unpredictable and potentially expensive (for instance Italy). I wish to take Italy as an example, since I have noticed a great lack of homogeneity in this regard among ethics committees. Without naming names, committees from some regions are much more demanding and expensive than those of other regions. Here we should remind ourselves that the main task of ethics committees is to ensure that research is performed ethically. Clinical research should be research done for a good reason, specifically to try to solve our patients' problems, and not for any other purposes. Ethics committees should help in this regard, and positively contribute to research, not try to block attempts to do something useful. However, many have now become expensive bureaucratic obstacles for young and motivated but poorly funded researchers. The negative consequences for a country with this problem are huge. It risks losing the capacity and motivation to innovate and properly evaluate innovations, in favour of smarter competitors worldwide.

Another barrier involves the publication of research data. Some journals (those which are reputed to be of higher quality or more respectable) become super-strict, but it is not always the quality of research that they are ensuring. Often, in fact, the decision of whether or not to publish is conditioned by the petty envy and livor of the referees, who, behind the cover of anonymity, try to hamstring their, often superior, "competitors". Sometimes, the problem is inept editors, who are unable or unwilling to make a balanced decision, or who rely too heavily on feedback from artificial "intelligence", plagiarism-assessment software. If you try to publish a follow-up paper of your previous research, it could be instantly rejected, with the motivation that you plagiarized yourself. But if the materials and methods are the same, the Introduction, Results and Discussion are often similar. What else would you expect? A completely new Materials and Methods section? A different study entirely?

These obstacles to publication, plus the desperate need to publish anything to advance your academic career, has paved the motorway to the so-called "predatory journals". To publish in these journals, all you have to do is pay, and this can be a much cheaper ave-

nue than seeking approval from most ethics committees! These open-access journals, once they manage to obtain an impact factor, are able to publish online in less than a week from submission. They are gradually becoming leaders in impact factor, which, please remember, rather than being an index of quality, is merely an indicator of popularity, akin to the likes you might get on social media.

Here at CTD, on the other hand, our mission is to try to offer a balanced and honest assessment of submitted manuscripts, and to help the author to correct or improve, where necessary, their work. We strive to become ever more rapid and efficient, without compromising on quality. We hope you appreciate our efforts.

Happy reading.

Marco