Editorial

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Clinical Chemistry Laboratory Medicine in the post-acute COVID-19 era

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There is now indisputable evidence that the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has not only had a dramatic impact on healthcare, society and the economy, but has also disrupted the world of scientific publishing [1]. As shown in Figure 1, the number of articles with the terms “COVID-19” OR “SARS-CoV-2” in Scopus, Web of Science and PubMed increased exponentially between 2020 and 2021, stabilized in 2022, and then showed a predictable decline in 2023 due to the reduced clinical burden of the latest SARS-CoV-2 variants of the “Omicron strain”, which is reflected in a renewed focus on “traditional” research topics (e.g., cancer, cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, etc.). Nevertheless, the number of articles containing the words “COVID-19” OR “SARS-CoV-2” in the period 2018–2022 was 578,893 in Scopus, 519,539 in Web of Science and 455,792 in PubMed, respectively. It is therefore not surprising that, especially in the initial phase of the pandemic, a few seminal papers have attracted an enormous number of citations, which has led to a kind of “inflated” impact factor (IF) in the last two years [2]. In fact, the IF of many scientific medical journals has reached an all-time high in the 2021 edition of the Clarivate Journal of Citation Report (JCR).

As for Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine (CCLM) [3], IF peaked at 8.49 in the 2021 edition of the JCR, then declined to 6.8 in the 2022 edition of the JCR and stabilized at 3.8 in the latest (2023) edition of the JCR, which is still 3 % higher than the last pre-pandemic value (i.e., 3.69). CCLM has also remained in the Q1 of the category “MEDICAL LABORATORY TECHNOLOGY”, with an IF score well above the median.
value of all journals in this category (i.e., 2.4). It is therefore not surprising that the number of COVID-19 articles in the top 10 list of those which contributed most to CCLM’s IF for 2021 and 2022 was 9/10, while only 3/10 COVID-19 articles appear in the top 10 list of articles that contributed most to the IF for 2023 [4–6], reflecting something of a return to normality.

These general considerations about IF aside, and notwithstanding the inherent ambiguity and potential flaws of journal IFs [7], CCLM remains a leading journal in the field of laboratory diagnostics after more than 60 years [8], along with its younger “sister” journal Diagnosis (Dx), whose IF is still as high as 2.2. The sudden drop in IF from 2023 does not discourage us at all, because we are in good company and the cause (the COVID-19 pandemic) is well known. Our rejection rate is still between 80 and 85%, which means that the quality of the articles we publish is still high. We have not been – and certainly will not be – inclined to inflate our IF with tricks, as some journals – that have been excluded from the JCR recently – may have done. Our main aim remains unchanged, namely to publish valid, scientifically sound and interesting articles on clinical laboratory medicine, and we would like to thank once again the Associated Editors, all members of the Editorial Board, the editorial team in Berlin and all our reviewers, whose qualified work continues to be fundamental to maintaining high quality in the articles we publish.

References