

# The Fate of Abstracts Presented at the 2013 and 2014 Annual Meetings of the Romanian Society of Gastroenterology and Hepatology

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Oral and poster presentations at annual national meetings of the Romanian Society of Gastroenterology and Hepatology (RSGH) provide a forum for education, communication and discussion of new research. However, for the wide-spread dissemination of the new research work, each presentation should be subsequently published as a full-text article in peer-reviewed, indexed journals. **Aim:** to evaluate the publication rate of full-text articles in peer-reviewed journals after being first presented as abstracts at two consecutive RSGH annual meetings.

**Methods:** A retrospective review of all abstracts presented at the annual meetings in 2013 and 2014 was performed. PubMed and Google Scholar were searched using abstract titles, first author's name and affiliation, and key words from the title to identify whether an abstract resulted in a peer-reviewed publication. Abstracts published in full-text were subsequently assessed for study type, study center, topics, publication year, journals and their impact factors (IFs). We chose the 2013 and 2014 meetings to ensure a minimum two-year follow-up period since the last meeting for the publication as full-length articles.

**Results:** A total of 562 abstracts were presented (275 in 2013, 287 in 2014). There were 150 oral presentations (93 in 2013, 57 in 2014) and 412 poster presentations (182 in 2013, 230 in 2014). Fifty seven of them (10.1%) were published as full-text articles, among them 26 (17.3%) after oral presentations and 31 (7.5%) after poster presentations ( $P=0.001$ ). University affiliation and original research work were most likely to be published. The average IFs of the journals which published the articles were 2.42 in 2013 and 1.87 in 2014.

**Conclusion:** The publication rate for the annual RSGH meetings abstracts as full-text articles in peer-reviewed journals is very low compared to the analyses performed in gastroenterology or other medical specialities from other countries. It is not clear yet what are the factors responsible for the failure of publication.

**Key words:** abstracts – presentations – publication rate – scientific meeting – peer review.

**Abbreviations:** RSGH: Romanian Society of Gastroenterology and Hepatology; JGLD: Journal of Gastrointestinal and Liver Diseases; IF: impact factor; BSG: British Society of Gastroenterology; DDW: Digestive Diseases Week.

## INTRODUCTION

The annual meetings of the Romanian Society of Gastroenterology and Hepatology (RSGH), similar to other medical societies' scientific meetings, provide a forum for education, communication and discussion of new research with colleagues from the field of gastroenterology. Usually, oral and poster presentations occupy the most important place in

the program, and this is understandable if we consider the importance of presenting research work in one's career development, especially when young researchers (trainees, gastroenterologists) and those who target an academic career are concerned. Publication in peer-reviewed, indexed journals is considered by many as the end point of any research study and attests its credibility and wide-spread dissemination. Unfortunately, most of the research work presented as abstracts is never published. In this respect, a Cochrane review showed that only 44% of abstracts were subsequently published as full-text articles in peer-reviewed journals [1]. Several medical societies have evaluated publication rates of the full texts of these abstracts which were originally presented during their national scientific meetings and reported various rates, ranging

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from 8% to 66% [2]. There are no previous reports on the publication rates of abstracts presented at the annual RSGH meetings, or of any other medical specialities in Romania. The aim of this study was to evaluate the subsequent publication rate as full-text articles of abstracts (oral and poster) presented originally at two consecutive (2013, 2014) RSGH annual meetings.

## METHODS

The oral and poster abstract presentations at the 2013 and 2014 RSGH annual scientific meetings were taken from the official programs and supplements of the *Journal of Gastrointestinal and Liver Diseases* (JGLD), where they were published. The following characteristics of the abstracts were recorded: type of presentation (oral or poster), projection (prospective or retrospective), nature of the study (meta-analysis, original research, or case report), clinical or basic research, single or multicenter studies, and the authors' affiliation (university, others).

For each abstract a computer search was performed with PubMed and Google Scholar databases, from July 1, 2013, to July 31, 2016 (last accessed on August 1, 2016), to determine if the abstract had been published as full-article in a peer-reviewed, indexed journal. Thus, for publication of full-length articles, a minimum 2-year follow-up period had elapsed since the last meeting. The computerized PubMed and Google Scholar search for identification of the published articles was carried out using the first author's name and main key words from abstract title. Three independent evaluators (C.A.C., O.T., C.M.L.) reviewed the published articles to confirm that they contained the same work presented in the abstracts, and any discrepancies were reviewed and resolved by consensus with another two senior authors (C.S., A.T.). When possible, personal contacts were established with most authors via e-mail and telephone to inquire about the fate of their abstract: if it had been published, and if not, what was the reason for non-publication. For published articles, the journal's name and its impact factor (IF) were recorded. The impact factors were established according to the Journal Citation Reports (Thomson Reuters, Web of Knowledge, and New York) [3].

Statistical analysis was performed using the SPSS 17.0 software (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA). Pearson's chi-square test was used to compare abstract-to-publication rates by presentation category or year of presentations. P value <0.05 was considered statistically significant.

## RESULTS

A total of 562 abstracts (150 oral, 412 poster) were presented at the two RSGH meetings: 275 (93 oral and 182 poster presentations) in 2013 and 287 (57 oral and 230 poster presentations) in 2014. Most of these presentations were original work (85%) from university teams (92%), clinical studies (93%) performed in a single centre (91%).

Overall, 57 of the 562 abstracts (10.1%) were published as full-text articles in peer-reviewed, indexed journals. The number and types of presentation as well as the publication rates are given in Table I. In 2013, the publication rate was

higher than in 2014 (11.6% vs. 8.7%), but the difference was not statistically significant ( $P=0.251$ ). On the whole, there was a significant difference between the publication rates for oral and poster presentations (17.3% vs. 7.5%;  $P=0.001$ ). The articles were published in international journals indexed by Thomson Reuters (former ISI) having average IFs 2.42 in 2013 and 1.87 in 2014. The majority of the full-text articles were published in *Medical Ultrasonography* and *JGLD*. Twelve presentations (7 oral presentations, 5 posters) were published as full articles in journals listed in Google Scholar, but not in PubMed.

**Table I.** Publication rates per year and type of presentation at the annual RSGH meetings

Year	Abstract presentation	Abstract (number)	Publications (number)	Publication rate (%)
2013	Overall	275	32	11.64%
	Oral	93	13	13.98%
	Poster	182	19	10.43%
2014	Overall	287	25	8.71%
	Oral	57	13	22.8%
	Poster	230	12	5.22%
2013 + 2014	Overall	562	57	10.14%
	Oral	150	26	17.33%
	Poster	412	31	7.52%

RSGH: Romanian Society of Gastroenterology and Hepatology

## DISCUSSION

The publication of abstracts presented at annual scientific meetings of the professional national gastroenterology societies as full-length articles in peer-reviewed medical journals is important not only for their authors (enhancing their resumes and increasing the chances for a career in gastroenterology), but also in the wide-spread dissemination of the new research findings. Moreover, the publication rates of abstracts are considered an indicator of the quality level of a scientific meeting [4]. Such rates vary greatly (from less than 10% to over 80%), depending on the type of meeting and medical speciality [1, 4-15]. However, it is generally considered that more than half of all abstracts are never published as full-text articles after their presentation in scientific meetings [1].

To the best of our knowledge, this study is the first to evaluate the rate of the subsequent publication of abstracts presented at RSGH meetings, or at any other medical national Romanian scientific meeting, in peer-reviewed journals as full-length articles. Overall, our study found that publication rates were much lower than what was reported in similar analyses performed abroad with regard to other specialties such as cardiology [5], urology [6,7], orthopedics [2, 8, 9], liver transplant [10, 11], cardiothoracic surgery [12], physical and rehabilitation medicine [13], neurological surgery [14], plastic surgery [4, 15] or gastroenterology/hepatology [16-22]. As mentioned above, the publication rate of abstracts vary greatly, depending on the medical specialty, with higher rates for internal medicine than surgery. A combining data from 79 reports including 29,729 abstracts showed that less than half (44.5%) of the abstracts were published as full-text articles in peer-reviewed journals [1]. In line with other reports, we found

significant differences between publication rates for oral and poster abstract presentations [1], and that abstracts based on original work and university affiliation were more likely to be published as full articles [13, 17].

Regarding the field of gastroenterology and its subspecialties there are five studies published as full-text [16-18, 20, 21] and one as an abstract [19]. Sanders et al. [16] audited the publication rate of abstracts presented at the British Society of Gastroenterology (BSG) meeting in March 1994, and reported that 69.8% (178 from 255) were subsequently published. Eloubeidi et al. [17] evaluated the publication rate of endoscopic research abstracts presented at the annual scientific meeting of the American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy, in May 1994, and found an overall publication rate of 25%, which was lower than in other medical societies. An earlier study [19] reported that, from thousands of abstracts submitted annually to the Digestive Diseases Week (DDW), approximately half were published afterwards as full articles in peer-reviewed journals. Timmer et al. [20] evaluated a random sample of abstracts presented at the DDW 1992-1995 meetings and found that 47% of them were later published as full papers. The DDW is probably the most important annual scientific event in gastroenterology, attracting thousands of gastroenterologists from all over the world. Hopper et al. [21] assessed the number and outcome of abstracts presented at consecutive BSG meetings between 1994 and 2002 and found a significant downward for the publication rates of abstracts as full-articles from 57.6% in 1994 to 30.7% in 2002.

The lack of publication depends on a variety of factors, most remaining unclear [22]. It should also be mentioned that the great majority of the abstract presentations unpublished in full papers had actually never been submitted to a peer-review journal. The most common reason mentioned in the literature for not submitting a full text manuscript is "the lack of time" [23]. Other reasons include: lack of interest in publication and low chance of acceptance. The last reason mentioned may be important for the authors from our (non-English speaking) geographic region, who expect, based on previous experience, the reviewers of most indexed journals to prefer manuscripts submitted from Western Europe and North America. Indeed, the full publication rate of abstracts presented at an international emergency medicine meeting was twice as high for abstracts sent from English-speaking countries than for those from non-English-speaking countries (36.9% vs. 18.8%) [24]. Also relevant is the acceptance rate for *Hepatology* according to the country of submission from 2007 through 2010, showing that none of the 21 manuscripts submitted from 6 countries from Eastern and Central Europe were accepted [25].

Our study has some limitations. The two-year follow-up period from the last meeting may still be too short to allow us to identify all published articles. In addition, the search was based only on PubMed and Google Scholar databases. Although both are important for medical literature, some articles might have been overlooked, leading to an underestimated publication rate.

## CONCLUSION

The full-text publication rate in peer-reviewed indexed journals for abstracts presented at RSGH annual scientific

meetings in 2013 and 2014 is much lower compared to the numbers for other similar meetings of other societies of gastroenterology, or other medical specialties from abroad. The great majority of the unpublished abstract presentations had never been submitted to a peer-review indexed journal as full articles for reasons not entirely known. Improving the quality of accepted abstracts and encouraging authors to submit their presentations for publication in peer-reviewed indexed journals as full-length articles may help increase publication rates of abstracts presented at our society (RSGH) annual meetings.

**Conflicts of interest:** None to declare.

**Authors' contribution:** A. T. designed the study, drafted the manuscript and reviewed it for its intellectual content. C. A. C., O. T., and C. M. L. collected and analyzed the data. C. S. conceived the study and contributed to its design and coordination. All authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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