REVISTA
ESPAÑOLA DE PODOLOGÍA

Publicación Oficial del Consejo General de Colegios Oficiales de Podólogos

EDITORIAL
Bilingual article English/Spanish

Rev Esp Podol. 2025;36(2):89-90
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.20986/revesppod.2026.1800/2025

Spanish Journal of Podiatry in the world of artificial intelligence: new ethical challenges in academic publications

Revista española de podología en el mundo de la inteligencia artificial: nuevos desafíos éticos en las publicaciones académicas

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It is impossible to deny that the world of scientific research is also being influenced by artificial intelligence (AI). The incorporation of AI tools into all publication and editorial processes is generating reactions of admiration and rejection in almost equal measure within the academic community. Those who advocate for their use highlight the enormous assistance these tools can provide in many stages of the publication process, such as literature searching, grammatical and stylistic correction of manuscripts, reference management, creation of figures and graphics, and, notably, the translation of texts into more than 30 languages, which has nearly definitively broken down the language barrier in research. However, critics of these tools point out potential shortcomings in the quality of the work and raise important ethical concerns derived from their use.

First, it is important to distinguish within research outputs between AI-assisted content and AI-generated content. AI-assisted content refers to manuscripts that are predominantly written by researchers and receive support from AI tools for tasks such as grammatical correction, improving textual clarity, stylistic suggestions, or figure creation. In this context, the author maintains full control over the article, and AI functions as a support tool to "polish" the final product. This type of use is generally well accepted by journals and editorial associations in academia as original work in which the integrity of the scientific process is not altered. A very different scenario is the use of AI-generated content, in which AI itself produces the article's content with little or no contribution from the authors. AI can generate entire sections or highly significant portions of text simply by following basic prompts from the author, and it is evident that this approach raises ethical issues regarding originality and authorship. Review articles, especially narrative reviews, are particularly prone to this type of problem.

As AI tools continue to improve progressively, it is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish original works written by individuals from those generated by AI, posing major challenges to the integrity and legitimacy of academic content. In fact, the production and subsequent publication of an ever-growing number of legitimate, fraudulent, or fictitious articles convincingly presented as legitimate represents a real existential crisis for the synthesis of scientific evidence in academia. The use of this technology is clearly attractive to unscrupulous authors who present such works as their own original creations and for whom the number of published articles, rather than their quality, represents the greatest achievement of their scientific activity. In conclusion, the emergence of AI in research and scientific publishing has generated an existential crisis for which, unfortunately, the academic and scientific community was not prepared.

Throughout 2025, most journals have begun to take a position on this issue, and *Revista Española de Podología* also needs to take steps in this direction to establish a framework upon which to move forward regarding the use of AI in the journal. First, the journal receives a high number of review articles, especially narrative reviews that are particularly susceptible to being generated by AI, and it has therefore decided to modify its policy regarding this type of publication starting in 2026, rejecting them as valid submissions for publication in the journal regardless of topic. Currently, there is no reliable or objective way to determine whether submitted review articles have been generated by AI, and we are therefore compelled to veto their publication. Moreover, it is worth questioning whether this type of article still makes sense in today's context: what previously required weeks or months of laborious searching, reading, and synthesis to produce a summarized article that allowed rapid updating on a specific topic can now be achieved by anyone, through AI, with unlimited

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and immediate access to literature reviews on virtually any topic, no matter how obscure, in a matter of seconds or minutes.

Second, also starting in 2026, the use of AI tools must be explicitly stated in the final declarations of the article, whether the manuscript has been AI-assisted in terms of literature use, grammar, style, or the creation of figures or graphics, or whether it includes AI-generated content. Authors will be required to make a formal declaration in this regard, clearly stating the extent of AI involvement in the final outcome of their work.

A new era in academia and scientific publishing has begun, and it must be embraced with responsibility and honesty. All stakeholders in scientific development—including authors, reviewers, editors, and, of course, readers—must work together to preserve the originality, integrity, and honesty of scientific evidence in the new AI-driven context in which we now operate.