

Inappropriate titles of abstracts

The title is probably the most important part of a medical communication. It is the part published in the secondary publications and it is stored in the data banks. The title must have the ability to give, in a few words, the stimulus to the reader to read the abstract and the article. Like good prose the title should be like a window pane [1]. In a paper in the *British Medical Journal*, J.W. Howie (1976), says that "if I am not interested in the title I do not read furthermore" [2]. However, most international journals containing subjects concerning Respiratory Medicine do not include any instructions about how to write a title correctly.

We evaluated 631 titles of abstracts submitted for the 23rd annual meeting of the SEPCR in Athens (1988) and published in the abstract book of the congress [3]. We considered errors: the existence of verb or other unnecessary words in the title, the abbreviations or subtitles and the extensive titles, containing more than 90 letters [4]. According to the international literature the absence of these errors characterizes the correct title. We divided the titles, according to the country of origin, into the ones belonging to the native speakers and those belonging to non-native speakers.

We showed 28 per cent of the titles had one or more than one error. The most frequent error was the extensive title (18 per cent). The existence of abbreviations or subtitles (15 per cent) and the existence of verb (12 per cent) followed. We identified statistically significant more errors in the titles of abstracts of the non-native speakers of English than in the titles of native speakers.

Thodore Kocher had said about surgical technique "Everything that is necessary and nothing that is unne-

cessary" and this is true especially of writing a title. Abbreviations, subtitles, loose sentences are useless and have no place in a title. Long titles as well as long abstracts are not more appealing to readers [5,6]. The errors are probably due to the lack of stressing the main point of the study, inefficient knowledge of the English language and decreased interest of the authors in the correct writing of a title.

Titles well written, and conforming to the rules will be more welcome both to the readers and to the participants of meetings.

References

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