

Why have a SISMEC journal?

The Italian Society of Medical Statistics and Clinical Epidemiology (SISMEC) is a society of biomedical statisticians working in academia, in the epidemiology services of the Italian national health service, and in the medical departments of the pharmaceutical industry. Even within these sectors there exists a range of different scientific areas of interest, specific backgrounds, and research activities. These differences are reflected in the wide variety of journals in which our members publish their work. This heterogeneity may be seen as the strength of biomedical statistics, but also, potentially, its current weakness. Its strength because it represents the peculiarity and also the most important challenge of this discipline, which is to combine statistical, epidemiological and clinical approaches and apply them to the many issues within the field of public health. Its weakness because it prevents the discipline from identifying easily with one specific scientific and cultural area.

The research groups that belong to SISMEC, in some cases achieving excellent results and the highest recognition, often work in areas that are implicitly skewed towards only one of the fields of interest of biomedical statistics. Because of this the scientific identity of the discipline runs the risk of overlapping that of other associations, such as the Italian Association of Epidemiology and the Italian Society of Hygiene, Preventive Medicine and Public Health. In the university world, there is the risk that biomedical statistics, understood as an academic discipline, could be confused with other disciplines, such as hygiene, statistics and even mathematics. Thus, the creation of a clear identity for biomedical statistics is still – in Italy – an objective that must be pursued.

SISMEC, moreover, struggles to find a role vis-à-vis the non-academic institutions involved in the coordination and promotion of clinical research. Local and regional health service operators rarely view SISMEC as one of the key scientific societies within the field of public health.

Full recognition of biomedical statistics will depend on the capacity of SISMEC to promote initiatives designed to clarify and draw attention to the role and peculiar functions of the discipline. The creation of a journal as the official voice of the society is a significant part of this endeavour.

The journal will be able to generate widespread interest by including broad critical reviews of topics of considerable cultural interest, such as, for example, the evolution of clinical experimentation, the use of databases in research, the role of biostatisticians on ethics committees, the principles of health resource management, and the training of biomedical statisticians and health professionals. It could also offer a platform for those with questions to ask, or answers to give, on the role of methodology in the biomedical field, on the ethical issues we are involved in, and on the political impact of our work. As such, the journal would fit in with the aims of SISMEC, one of which is to provide health professionals with extensive and timely information on the progress achieved within the field of biomedical and health statistics and its allied disciplines (biometrics, epidemiology, clinical epidemiological methods, health service planning and organisation).

The strategic importance of this initiative is clear from its main objectives.

- *The journal's primary objective is to promote SISMEC, and with it the discipline of biomedical statistics, raising its profile and giving it a clear cultural identity. Accordingly, it is quite clear that the official journal of Italy's biomedical statisticians cannot and must not identify with journals that traditionally target the members of other scientific societies. The journal's name (Biomedical Statistics & Clinical Epidemiology: BMSCE) reflects the combination of a common cultural basis, statistics, with its application in clinical epidemiological research.*

- *A second aim is to serve as a point of reference for health professionals and researchers and as the natural vehicle through which to foster debate among Italy's biomedical statisticians. BMSCE does not presume to compete with international journals with a much larger distribution, or to replace them as a source of updating on relevant topics. Rather, the journal targets the local scientific community, guaranteeing constant updates on research topics developed by Italy's biomedical statisticians and favouring the growth of national research groups, through the reciprocal sharing of expertise and training opportunities in the area of interest.*
- *Finally, vis-à-vis the international scientific community, the journal aims to be both a showcase and an interlocutor, drawing attention to the activities of the field of biomedical statistics in Italy and favouring the internationalisation of the discipline. Hence the decision to produce BMSCE in English. The aim of BMSCE is not to attract the most qualified research produced by Italian groups, which, it is to be hoped, will continue to be published in international journals of biostatistics, epidemiology, public health and general and specialist medicine. Neither should BMSCE become a vehicle for articles not accepted for publication in the international literature. Rather, BMSCE is intended to be a response to the need to bring together Italian studies and experiences, at the same time sharing their methods and results with the international community.*

So, the journal aims to intervene in the most important Italian and international debates in an innovative fashion and adopting its own approach. The basic precept is not to divorce the theory and rigour of "pure" statistics from the theory and interventions that are the prerogative of the public health sector and of clinical practice. In short, BMSCE intends to occupy the ground of active dialogue between research, both theoretical and applied, and medical science. The aim, in the attempt to rise to the great challenges facing the modern public health sector, is to encourage interaction between knowledge derived through research and knowledge born of direct experience of the problems of daily clinical practice. BMSCE is taking on the difficult task of being, at the same time, a setting for confrontation and exchange, a stimulus for reflection and research, a vehicle for the diffusion of studies and experiences, and an instrument to favour and support the creation of local systems that draw on the disciplines of biomedical statistics and clinical epidemiology.

This endeavour, certainly ambitious, is based on the knowledge that it is only by joining forces and intellects that we can approach the critical mass that is becoming increasingly necessary in order to rise to the challenges presented by today's biomedical research world. And the undertaking rests on the belief that all will feel involved in the project and ready to contribute to the process that will turn this journal into what we want it to be.

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