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Clarivate Analytics  
Amy Bourke-Waite, Director of External Communications  
Marian Hollingsworth, Director of Editorial Relations  
Friars House  
160 Blackfriars Road  
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***Forensic Science International: Genetics suppression from the JCR 2019***

Dear Mrs. Bourke-Waite and Mrs. Hollingsworth,

the Executive Committee of the Spanish and Portuguese Speaking Working Group of the International Society for Forensic Genetics (GHEP-ISFG) would like to share with you our feelings about the suppression of *Forensic Science International: Genetics* (FSIGEN) from the Journal Citation Report 2019 (JCR).

Allow us first to briefly introduce our organization. The GHEP-ISFG ([www.ghep-isfg.org](http://www.ghep-isfg.org)) was created in 1992 as a working group of the International Society for Forensic Genetics and officially registered under the Spanish law as a non-profit organization in 1995 (Spanish National Registry of Associations, number 162.045). Originally integrated by members from Spain and Portugal, then expanded its frontiers to Latin America and to other European countries, gathering to date 288 affiliates belonging to 166 forensic genetics laboratories from 25 countries (2019 census). Our general goal is to contribute to the development and spreading of the scientific knowledge in the field of Forensic Genetics and to promote relationships and scientific cooperation among its members and with other ISFG working groups and related scientific societies. In this sense, the GHEP-ISFG has taken on a proactive policy through the organization of scientific annual meetings, workshops, and the creation of a proficiency testing program which is the first and the only ISO accredited program worldwide specific for forensic genetics. Moreover, the GHEP-ISFG has always encouraged the organization of collaborative exercises where researchers from academic institutions and experts in casuistic work together in pertinent scientific questions. This represents an added value for both parties, creating a productive environment where the exchange of ideas benefits researchers from the knowledge of practical problems and limitations, and practitioners from being involved in the development of cutting-edge research, which can be rapidly translated to practice. To date, more than 40 collaborative exercises were carried out and, more importantly, 34 research articles were produced only in the frame of these GHEP-ISFG activities (<https://ghep-isfg.org/en/publications/>). Not surprisingly, during the last decade, all of those articles were published in FSIGEN or FSIGEN supplement series, being the first and the only publication specialized in the field of forensic genetics indexed in JCR. Since it was launched in 2007, the members of our association, as well as the community of forensic geneticists around the globe, found in FSIGEN a highly qualified media to share the results of their investigations. On the other hand, it is in FSIGEN where practitioners find not only the most relevant scientific advances but also the ultimate guidelines for best practices and important recommendations regarding



methodologies and ethical principles. The possibility to concentrate the specific topics in the matter in a “single” dedicated journal greatly facilitated the exchange of information and translation of new developments among experts in this field, increasingly attracting new readers and researchers, and positioning the journal as the one where every forensic geneticist wants to be found. This was also boosted by the fact that ISFG membership includes access to the journal (online and hard versions). This is mirrored in the steadily growth of FSIGEN since its launch.

On July 22<sup>nd</sup>, we were informed by the board of the ISFG that FSIGEN will not be given a 2019 Journal Impact Factor in this year’s release of the Journal Citation Report (JCR) due to a high rate of self-citations. The news caused surprise and concern among the members of the GHEP-ISFG. First, the decision was not easily understood since, being FSIGEN the only specialized journal in the field where the top of the forensic genetic science is presented, it is logical to expect a high number of self-citations compared to other non-specialized journals. Indeed, it is not true that a high self-cite rate is necessarily grounded in unethical publishing practices. All of us are authors and reviewers of FSIGEN and we can testify that we never, under no circumstance, were pressured or encouraged to promote self-cites. Also, we never received information that it occurred differently with any of our members. It is obvious for the forensic community that if the journal has a high self-cite rate that is because the most relevant publications in the field converge there. Furthermore, we cannot anticipate how the community (because this concerns to a community and research area, not to FSIGEN) can fix an alleged problem, artificially created by outsiders of the field. Second, this situation can have damaging effects in different ways if not reversed in the short term. Many funding agencies worldwide rely on the principle of only considering JCR indexed journals when evaluating a project or personal grant proposal. Suppression of a journal, regarding the previous year will with no doubt result in a detrimental situation for researchers who worked hard to publish their work in the journal with more impact in the area, being unaware of the situation regarding JCR. Therefore, the loss of competitive funding for the research area is an immediate consequence due to the severed curriculum vitae of the applicants. This will necessarily lead to a delay on the scientific research development and translation, having an impact in social life and well-being of the citizens worldwide. This is particularly true in the case of forensic genetics, where developments are rapidly translated to casework, providing valuable tools for law enforcement and fight against crime. Furthermore, researchers will be forced to look for new publishing horizons, leading to the situation before FSIGEN inception when the results of specific research in this area were disseminated among generalist publications instead of having one specialized journal. This represents a drawback in the translation of research since, as it is easily understandable, practitioners may find literature search (among a plethora of generalist journals) overwhelming and prohibitively time-consuming. Indeed, we have no doubts that the suppression of FSIGEN from JCR will have a dramatic negative impact in the quality of the forensic practice as academic researchers will submit their works to generalist journals, JCR indexed, and some of these works will become somehow lost, never reaching casework experts.



It is not our intention to question the numbers that support Clarivate's decision. What we believe is that the application of the algorithm should be evaluated in conjunction with the specific context of each Journal, as it is the case of "niche" journals like FSIGEN. Otherwise, it could be possible to arrive to misleading conclusions and decisions that could quickly demolish years of consolidated effort of an entire scientific community, which in the case of forensic genetics have shown tremendous results in fight against crime, humans' rights violation and other cases.

We prepared a manifest regarding this situation (<https://ghep-isfg.org/en/5149-2/>), which was made public on August 28, 2020 ([https://retractionwatch.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/ISFG\\_suppression\\_final\\_Subs\\_RetractionWatch.pdf](https://retractionwatch.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/ISFG_suppression_final_Subs_RetractionWatch.pdf)). In just one week, the manifest was subscribed by nearly 500 forensic geneticists worldwide.

Thus, we would appreciate very much that Clarivate™ examine their resolution about the suppression of FSIGEN to avoid banning the forensic geneticists community of counting with a high-quality specialized journal. We are optimistic that our claim will be positively considered, and the decision will be promptly reverted.

Thanking you in advanced,

Yours sincerely,

The GHEP-ISFG Executive Committee

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President

Lourdes Prieto  
Vicepresident

Héctor Rángel Villalobos  
Secretary

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Treasurer