

The Origins of the Journal of the Lisbon Medical Sciences Society

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ABSTRACT: The need of update was acutely felt by Portuguese surgeons and physicians in the early XIX century when contacting with their French and English military counterparts during the Napoleonic invasions of Portugal (1807-1810). This led to the creation of a medical forum overcoming the scarcity of scientific information in a country far away from the most advanced medical centers. Then, the *Sociedade das Ciências Médicas de Lisboa* (The Medical Sciences Society of Lisbon) was founded in 1822, beginning immediately with the organization of regular scientific meetings. The aim of this society also included the scientific assistance to the national health authorities and the spread of scientific information to the medical community throughout the country, reaching professionals at distant and isolated regions where no other source of updated should be attained. So, a medical journal was created with its first issue being published in January 1835. Inevitably, during such a long period many political, social and sanitary turmoil occurred but the journal survived, being one of the elder medical publications worldwide. Nowadays a new era began by becoming the official journal of the two medical schools in Lisbon and so strengthening the aim of this 189 years old medical journal.

KEY WORDS: Sociedade das Ciências Médicas de Lisboa, Jornal da Sociedade de Ciências Médicas de Lisboa, Origins of the Medical Journals, Origins of the Portuguese Medical Schools in the XIX Century

THE HISTORY

The Sociedade das Ciências Médicas de Lisboa (Lisbon Medical Sciences Society) (SCML) held its first (preparatory) session on June 28, 1822, at the Convent of S. Francisco da Cidade, where, since 1817, the Regimental Hospitals wards were located. Fourteen military surgeons and physicians were present.

The following day, during a new meeting, it was decided to increase the number of members to a total of 21, by also admitting pharmacists. These individuals constituted themselves as “institutors”. They were 8 physicians, 10 surgeons and 3 pharmacists.⁽¹⁾

This fulfilled the needs felt by healthcare professionals, acknowledging the lag of Portuguese Medicine and Surgery in comparison to its counterparts across Europe. Interaction with French and English military surgeons since the Seven Years’ War, followed by the Napolionic Invasions and subsequent periods, highlighted this egregious situation.

The purposes of this Society were defined as follows:

“to establish ties with more qualified physicians and surgeons in Portugal or abroad”. ⁽¹⁾

They were also concerned about the need to submit new or already existing medicines to a scrupulous evaluation for new formulations or presentations. To meet this

aim, several criteria were defined. Public health concerns were also expressed, so the Society aimed to divulge, by means of publications, the various endemic or epidemic diseases that might occur and also provide recommendations on public health affairs.

Several other meetings took place before the solemn "Founding Session" which took place at the large hall of the Convent's library, previously adapted to military hospital, on December 1, 1822. This date was chosen due to the symbolism of the Restoration of Independence Day, December 1, 1640.

On January 11, a delegation was received by the king D. João VI at the Bemposta Palace. After the presentation of the Society and their purposes, the king said: "I greatly praise the foundation of a society that may provide great services to the Kingdom and I always will provide it with all possible protection."⁽²⁾

Despite such good auspices and the enthusiasm of the participants, as can be anticipated by the high number of sessions held (24 in a period of 6 months), its activity was interrupted in June 1823, due to the dissolution determined by the new absolutist regime, allegedly because it was "a focus of conspiracy and protest against the triumphant royal policy."⁽²⁾ This led to a few of its members to seek exile.

However, the commitment to scientific progress was indomitable and overcame the obscurantism. Thirteen years later, in 1835, with the political constitution returning to normalcy, the SCML experienced a resurgence under the leadership of the same president, Francisco Soares Franco, a professor at the University of Coimbra. This demonstrated unequivocally the steadfast determination of its members.

In fact, on May 16, 1835, in a notice published in the Official Gazette, doctors, surgeons and pharmacists were summoned to a meeting at the Associação Mercantil Lisbonense to restore the SCML.⁽³⁾

THE BACKGROUND

Even after death, the proclamation of Manoel Constâncio's (1726-1817) ideals, as published in the Official Gazette, continued to resonate through the corridors of the Hospital de S. José, etching itself into the memories of his disciples: it was necessary to promote the training of surgeons, providing them knowledge in the academic sphere and expertise that might only be acquired in the most developed European centers. He himself, motivated some of his disciples to go abroad

(to England and Denmark), which was an innovation in the Portuguese context.⁽⁴⁾ Constâncio fought for the foundation of a School dedicated to surgery. However, he did not see the results of his efforts, as he died in 1817 at the age of 91. However, the enduring relevance of his vision inspired the foundation of the *Régia Escola de Cirurgia*, (The Royal Surgery School) in 1825, which was followed by the *Escola Médico-Cirúrgica de Lisboa* (Lisbon Medical-Surgical School), in 1836. There is, therefore, an almost perfect overlap between the dates of the restoration of the SCML and the foundation of the surgical and medical teaching schools, reflecting a general awareness for the need of the development of health sciences in Portugal.

THE JOURNAL

This marked an era of remarkable dynamism, breaking large times of stagnation. While the enlightenment century arrived later for us, as tradition dictated, its impact was undeniable. Within this backdrop emerged the imperative to establish a 'Society of Medical Sciences,' a forum designed to foster comprehensive peer reflection on the future directions of national medical practice. This encompassed all facets, including pharmacy, while simultaneously ensuring the dissemination of the most recent advances in these fields. It was recognized as an indispensable pathway for the professionals to remain abreast on this ever-evolving landscape. Furthermore, it seemed necessary to create a publication to publicize and preserve the memory of the Society's activities.

Even before the restoration of the Society, the "Jornal das Ciências Médicas de Lisboa" appeared in January 1835 (fig. 1), and continued into the next year, bearing the name it holds to this day: *Jornal da Sociedade das Ciências Médicas de Lisboa* (Journal of the Society of Medical Sciences of Lisbon – JSCML) (fig. 2). It should be noted that the motto "Grata res est profutura vulgare" was written on its front page since the first issue, which can be freely translated as: "Everything that benefits the people is a good thing".

Thus, in the Prospectus (preface) of the aforementioned first issue of the JSCML, its purpose was clearly established: "The rapid progress of medical sciences in the last few years, the influx and variety of writings that, due to the continuous and incessant number of works on the different branches of the art of healing enriching science every day, have made medical

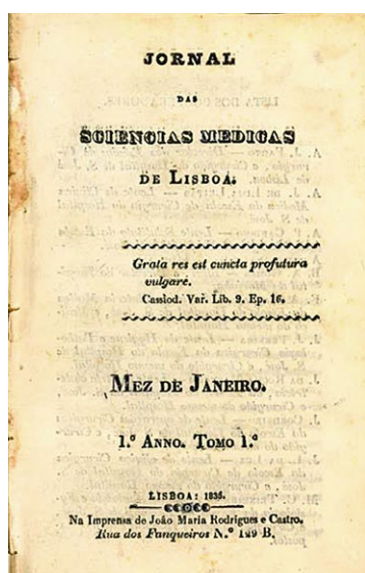


Fig 1. Cover page of Journal of the Medical Sciences of Lisbon – January, 1835 (FMUL Library)

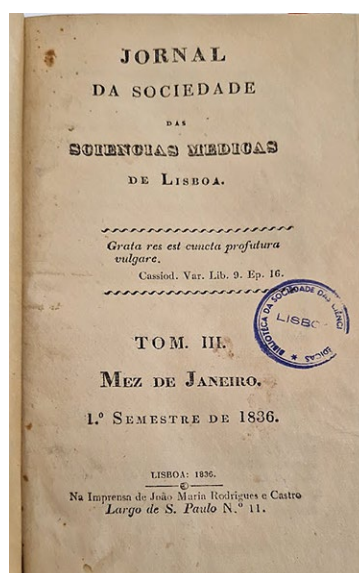


Fig 2. Cover page of Journal of the Society of Medical Sciences of Lisbon – January, 1836. (FMUL Library)

journals, of such an high quality publications, absolutely necessary. The multiplicity of these works, and the acquaintance they receive everywhere, are one of the most evident proofs of their real merit, which, moreover, is naturally deduced from the ease with which such writings can readily convey observations, experiences and, in short, all the novelties that have occurred in science, without which, only later, or perhaps never, would they be known, given the difficulties of their authors in getting them published.”⁽⁵⁾

The prestige of the SCML and its newspaper can be gauged by the exchange it maintained with its European counterparts, one such example was the controversy that took place in 1914 between Ricardo Jorge, then president of the SCML, and C. Mense, director of the Archiv für Schiffs und Tropen-Hygiene owing to the fact that Ricardo Jorge published an article in JSCML producing some comments deploring the beginning of the world conflict. This prompted a reply from C. Mense, accusing Ricardo Jorge of being “anti-Germanophile”, which led to the end of the exchange between the publications.⁽⁶⁾

The times went by with the usual sociopolitical vicissitudes, to which the Society and its newspaper could not remain indifferent. The frequency of publication, initially monthly, underwent changes throughout the years.

In the report of the Secretary of SCML for the academic year 1973/1974, it was noted: “the great diffi-

culties in obtaining scientific material for publication from the different sections”.⁽⁷⁾ The journal underwent a reformulation in 1983 adopting a more spaced and irregular periodicity. It became annual from 2000 to 2003 and then experienced a period of lethargy.

The contingencies that long-lived societies often go through often end up reinforced by these setbacks.

Thus, the *Jornal da Sociedade das Ciências Médicas de Lisboa*, one of the oldest medical publications in the world, still active, now re-emerges revitalized as the official journal of the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Lisbon and the Faculty of Medical Sciences of the Universidade Nova of Lisbon, endorsing to its members the gratifying undertaking of pursuing it.

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