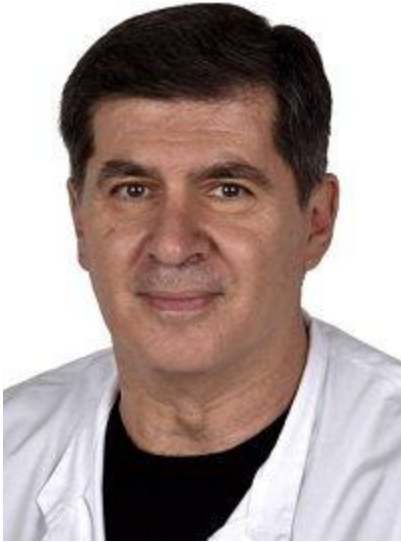


Dragan Subotic



Dr. Dragan Subotic currently works at the Clinic for Thoracic Surgery, University Hospital Zurich, Switzerland. He was the Head of Thoracic Surgery in the Clinic for Thoracic Surgery in Belgrade in 1996, and was nominated Director of that clinic in 2013. He was elected Professor of Surgery at the University of Belgrade School of Medicine in 2008. From 2008-2011, he was a member of the Thoracic domain of the EACTS. For many years, he participated in the activities of the Surgical Assembly of the ERS and served as Assembly Head during 2013-2016. In 2017, he moved to Switzerland and worked 2 years in the University Hospital in Basel. Dr. Subotic's field of interest is in general thoracic surgery, excluding esophageal surgery.

JTD: What makes a healthy peer review system?

Dr. Subotic: In my opinion, prospective clinical trials, multicentric and randomized studies should be reviewed by a minimum of 4 reviewers. If one recognized authority/opinion leader in a particular field is included, the number of reviewers could be reduced. The reviewers should sufficiently reference themselves, but unfortunately, there are not too many thoracic surgeons. I am sure that each associate editor for a particular research area knows at least several competent colleagues who could do the task properly. Strict adherence to the rules by reviewers is mandatory for an objective review. The quality of the review is monitored by associate editors who are at the same

time in charge of appeals from authors in case of any doubts concerning the review objectivity.

JTD: What reviewers have to bear in mind while reviewing papers?

Dr. Subotic: First of all, reviewers should always be aware of the efforts a particular team invested in the submitted study, especially for original research papers. Thus, each of the submitted papers is a potential contribution for practice and as such deserves a certain time investment from the reviewers. It is the reviewer's responsibility to keep abreast of the state-of-the-art in a particular field, in order to assess whether the paper brings something really "new or innovative".

Second, as we all are practicing surgeons, we should be fully aware of the importance of the studies that "only confirm" the existing pool of evidence. In particular research areas with limited evidence, any single contribution may be valuable. Many active surgeons with a good and broad activity, who are interested and motivated to publish their data, are not in a situation to participate in prospective or randomized studies.

Last but not least, reviewers should recognize the potential of a paper to become a valuable contribution. Even if the paper does not fit the journal requirements, mostly when the structure, style and grammar are suboptimal, reviewers should focus on the core of the content and suggest corrections, unless the research methodology comes into question. For example, reviewers can suggest an additional analysis from the already existing data in order to clarify some unclear points. With detailed point-by-point comments and suggestions, the paper could be significantly improved. It is the part of the reviewer's work that I find most challenging.

JTD: Peer reviewing is often anonymous and non-profitable, what motivates you to do so?

Dr. Subotic: This is a good question. Yes, peer reviewing is anonymous by definition, but for those who invited you to be a reviewer, you are not anonymous. This invitation means that your work was once recognized by somebody who had the confidence that you would be able to do that correctly. And from the moment you accepted the invitation for the first time, it simply becomes a part of your activity. Furthermore, performing a review is a way of sharing experience with others. Even though the process is confidential, it is always beneficial to both sides – everybody can learn something from it.

JTD: What is the role of institutional review board (IRB) in research studies?

Dr. Subotic: The practice varies broadly throughout the world. In my opinion, the optimal situation would be to have an IRB as a first step towards approval of the planned research through the regional ethic committees (organized by the corresponding governmental bodies), verifying not only ethical, but also the methodological aspect of the research. The primary role of any review board should be to give the appropriate ethical and methodological frame and to facilitate the work. However, this process should not be too complicated and time consuming, in which case it becomes disincentive and counterproductive.