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Original article

*Human resource training and management at the Cuban Boxing Academy:
A perspective informed by Alcides Sagarra Carrón's educational
philosophy*

*[La formación y gestión de los recursos humanos de la Escuela Cubana de boxeo desde la
concepción educativa de Alcides Sagarra Carrón]*

*[A formação e gestão de recursos humanos da Escola Cubana de Boxe a partir da concepção
educacional de Alcides Sagarra Carrón]*

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Professor Alcides Sagarra Carón carried out extensive educational work from his beginnings. As the head coach of the national boxing team and leader of the technical group that accompanied him in the technical-tactical preparation of his students, without deviating from the idea and importance of training his boxers in values, which brought numerous achievements to the country in international events. The concepts gradually implemented within the national team laid the groundwork that led to and contributed to the formation of the Cuban Boxing Academy, recognized and admired internationally.

Objective: To assess Professor Alcides Sagarra's contribution to the training and direction of Cuban boxers from his educational perspective. To highlight his contributions to the Cuban School of that sport and to Cuban sports in general by systematizing his main ideas, experiences, actions, and concepts regarding educational theory and practice, as contained in his work.

Methods: The use of interviews combined with other theoretical-level methods such as historical/logical, analysis/synthesis, and inductive/deductive methods allowed for the construction of a chronology of Alcides Sagarra Carón's life and the periodization of his work.

Results: The procedures and strategies that allowed him to structure the Cuban Boxing Academy scientifically and methodologically, along with the training and management of human resources were identified, leading to his recognition as the father of the Cuban Boxing Academy.

Keywords: Cuban boxing, Cuban school of boxing.

RESUMEN

Introducción: el profesor Alcides Sagarra Carón, realizó una amplia labor educativa desde sus inicios como entrenador principal de la selección nacional de boxeo y líder del grupo técnico que lo acompañó en la preparación técnico-táctica de sus pupilos sin



desviarse de la idea e importancia de la formación en valores de sus boxeadores que tantos logros brindaron al país en eventos internacionales. Los conceptos paulatinamente implementados dentro del plantel nacional fueron dando los primeros pasos que condujeron y contribuyeron a la formación de la llamada Escuela Cubana de Boxeo, reconocida y admirada internacionalmente.

Objetivo: valorar el aporte de profesor Alcides Sagarra a la formación y dirección de los boxeadores cubanos desde su concepción educativa. Destacar sus aportes a la Escuela Cubana de ese deporte y al deporte cubano en general a partir de la sistematización de sus principales ideas, experiencias, acciones y concepciones sobre la teoría y la práctica educativa, contenidas en su obra.

Materiales y métodos: el uso de entrevistas en combinación con otros métodos de nivel teórico como el histórico/lógico, análisis/síntesis e inductivo/deductivo permitió la construcción de una cronología de la vida y periodización de la obra de Alcides Sagarra Carón.

Resultados: se identificaron los procedimientos y estrategias que le permitieron estructurar científica y metodológicamente la Escuela Cubana de Boxeo, la formación y gestión de los recursos humanos de la Escuela Cubana de boxeo siendo reconocido como el padre de la Escuela Cubana de Boxeo.

Conclusiones: la realización de este trabajo permitió acercarnos un poco más a la figura de Alcides Sagarra y sobre todo a sus métodos de enseñanza en función de garantizar la gestión de sus recursos humanos.

Palabras clave: boxeo cubano, escuela cubana de boxeo.

RESUMO

Introdução: O professor Alcides Sagarra Carón, realizou um extenso trabalho educativo desde o seu início como técnico da seleção nacional de boxe e líder do grupo técnico que o acompanhou na preparação técnico-tática de seus alunos, sem se desviar da ideia e importância do treinando nos valores de seus boxeadores que tantas conquistas trouxeram ao país em eventos internacionais. Os conceitos gradualmente



implementados na seleção nacional foram dando os primeiros passos que conduziram e contribuíram para a formação da chamada Escola Cubana de Boxe, reconhecida e admirada internacionalmente.

Objetivo: valorizar a contribuição do professor Alcides Sagarra para a formação e direção dos boxeadores cubanos desde sua concepção educacional. Destacar suas contribuições à Escola Cubana desse esporte e ao esporte cubano em geral a partir da sistematização de suas principais ideias, experiências, ações e concepções sobre teoria e prática educacional, contidas em sua obra.

Materiais e métodos: a utilização de entrevistas em combinação com outros métodos de nível teórico como histórico/lógico, análise/síntese e indutivo/dedutivo permitiu a construção de uma cronologia da vida e periodização da obra de Alcides Sagarra Carón.

Resultados: foram identificados os procedimentos e estratégias que lhe permitiram estruturar científica e metodologicamente a Escola Cubana de Boxe, a formação e gestão dos recursos humanos da Escola Cubana de Boxe, sendo reconhecido como o pai da Escola Cubana de Boxe.

Palavras-chave: Boxe cubano, escola cubana de boxe.

INTRODUCTION

The rise of Cuban boxing occurred at the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico, where the first medals were won after the triumph of the Revolution. At the event in the Aztec capital, the Cuban delegation secured two silver medals, won by Rolando Garbey in the 71-kilogram category and Enrique Regüíferos in the 63.5-kilogram category. For Sagarra, who presented 10 boxers (although only Rafael Carbonel (51 kg), Fermín Espinosa (54 kg), and Roberto Caminero Chocolatito Pérez (60 kg) had previously competed in the Tokyo 1964 Olympics), this was a resounding success.



The history of the Cuban Boxing Academy includes several contributors who, in various ways, updated the pedagogical thinking of the coaching collective in Cuba. In this regard, the German Curt Rossentrit (1963-1967) was the first coach to work directly with the national team, followed by the Bulgarian Slavi Vanshevarov (1970-1972), who led the first courses for judges, referees, and coaches on the island. The Russians Andrés Shervonenko and Basili Romanov worked alongside the national team's coaching collective (1973-1974), culminating with Russian Víctor Vitrov (1975-1978) and Saúl Warchavar (1976-1979), who worked directly with the youth national team.

From all of the above, the Cuban Boxing Academy promoted its scientific demonstration to the world, certifying itself with undeniable sports results, which since 1971 have been recognized as systemic at both national and international levels. The string of successes that began at the Pan American Games in Cali, Colombia, and continued at the Olympic Games, the most demanding stage, allowed to display the courage and motor culture of our boxers (Rodríguez, 2012).

However, the strategy of boxing from the Island began its scientific presentation to the world as an undeniable result starting in 1971 with the Pan American Games held in Cali, Colombia. In this continental event, Rafael Carbonel (51 kg), Enrique Regüíferos (63.5 kg), Emilio Correa (67 kg), and Rolando Garbey (71 kg) won gold medals. Additionally, Douglas Rodríguez (71 kg), Manuel Torres (57 kg), and Teófilo Stevenson (over 81 kg) earned bronze medals. In the Olympic Games, the ascent to stardom came in Munich, Germany in 1972, with three gold medals. The fruits of Sagarra's working method were beginning to be seen on the international stage. In the German capital, Orlando Martínez (54 kg) triumphed over Mexican Alfonso Zamora by a score of 3-2; Emilio Correa (67 kg) defeated Hungarian Janos Kadji 5-0, and Teófilo Stevenson (over 81 kg) won against Romanian Ion Alexe by walkover, following his spectacular knockout of the so-called "American White Hope," Duane Bobbick, in the semifinals.



At that time, Professor Alcides Sagarra, as the head of the Cuban National Coaches Collective, projected important conceptual and practical transformations in national boxing. This was based on principles for sports selection, collective training planning by weight divisions, performance indicators to be used by technical-tactical evaluators and division heads, as well as genuine pedagogical direction for preparation and competition. It was not an isolated phenomenon seeking talent or forming laboratory athletes, but rather a harmonious effort that encompassed the entire educational system of the country, including the Sports Initiation School (EIDE by its acronym in Spanish) and the Higher School of Athletic Improvement (ESPA by its acronym in Spanish). As a result, the victories of boxers from the Greater Antilles came in every relevant event they participated in: Olympic Games, World Championships, World Cups, Pan American Games, and Central American Games. Under his pedagogical projection, excellent boxers were developed over nearly four decades. In addition to those previously mentioned, Olympic glory was achieved by Jorge Hernández, Ángel Herrera, Juan Bautista Hernández, Andrés Aldama, and José Gómez, all between 1976 and 1980, as Cuba was justifiably absent from the Olympic Games in Los Angeles 1984 and Seoul 1988. During those years, notable figures included Adolfo Horta, Ángel Espinosa, Carlos García, Pablo Romero, Bernardo Comas, Julio Quintana, Pedro Orlando Reyes, and Juan Torres Odelín, among many others whose list would be endless. Most reached global glory. Therefore, the objective is proposed to evaluate the contribution of Alcides Sagarra Caro to the training and management of Cuban boxers from his educational perspective.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In the relevant investigations, both empirical and theoretical research methods were used. The historical-logical methods, analysis-synthesis, inductive-deductive, and interviews were employed.



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

While reading an article from the *Olimpia Magazine*, I found a piece that clearly referenced the role played by Master Sagarra in the formation of the aptly named Cuban Boxing Academy. In this regard, Dr. Misael Salvador González (2007), who worked alongside Alcides for several years, expressed "When I think of the Cuban Boxing Academy and its Olympic results, I consider Professor Sagarra, the strategist who managed to see the right moment (1964), and delineate the creative and partially intuitive process beyond the reach of conscious analysis and the resulting plans. In this sense, Alcides Sagarra Carón is for Cuban and international boxing since 1968, the Technical Chief in constant improvement. That flexible thinker, who understood the complete range of alternatives and constantly weighed the costs and benefits of the competitive regime, the performance level of each of his boxers, and the professional development of his trainers, medical personnel, scientists, among others. For this reason, he would always say, 'what would happen if...?' 'Or 'If the situation were such and such, what would be our best course of action?' These expressions led him to become a strategist in boxing. Sagarra's way of thinking was extremely complex, characterized by a series of elements that are not accessible to common thought. Rather, it is a nearly unique and particular mix of mental processes that combine with a series of elements: intuitive thinking, tacit knowledge, creative thought, natural talent, and a spark (the ability to envision brilliant ideas that spontaneously emerge), creating an emergent behavior as a style of leadership (González, Alcides Sagarra Caron. A Boxing Strategist", (Rodríguez 2017).

The king of Cuban boxers, Alcides Sagarra Carón, who was declared the best coach in his specialty in the world, due to the more than 300 medals won by his pupils, was born in Santiago de Cuba on August 18, 1934. He is considered a glory of Cuban sports and the father of the Cuban Boxing Academy. He holds a Doctorate in Pedagogical Sciences and is a Hero of Labor of the Republic of Cuba. He was named the best coach of the 20th century in Cuba and received the same recognition awarded by IBA. He did not have an easy childhood, as his family was poor. His father was a baker and confectioner, while his mother was a seamstress. He was the brother of Diógenes and Arsenio. He left school



after the fourth grade to help support his family by cleaning shoes and selling fruits and vegetables because "we had to make ends meet." From a young age, he suffered from severe asthma, stating, "I had trouble breathing." Due to his frequent visits to the gym, a man suggested that he start practicing boxing to alleviate his asthma, claiming he knew boxers who had overcome it through practice. "Right then, I got myself into trouble with my mom," Alcides recalls. At the age of 14, he started to practice the sport in secret, and according to him, "the asthma went away for good." He weighed around 57 kilograms and was known for hitting hard; he participated in 97 amateur bouts, winning 87 and at some point becoming the provincial champion of Santiago de Cuba. His initial sports coach was Ángel Cabrales, starting at the gym on Pereda and Tercera Streets in Santiago de Cuba. He also trained under Odelio Wilson. One day, along with them, he set out for the Cuban capital, always facing opposition from his mother, who did not want him to become a boxer (Mesa Redonda, 2017).

While training, he felt the need to improve himself, and in 1982, he graduated in Physical Culture from the Manuel Fajardo University of Physical Culture and Sports. He became an associate professor at this school and eventually directed the Technical Commission on Rules and Refereeing of the Cuban Boxing Commission. Alcides spent much of his time at the training farm. Sometimes he even slept there because "you had to get up early to catch the fresh air, between four-thirty and five in the morning." At the farm, he taught his athletes the necessary maneuvers using makeshift equipment he invented. "We were a work collective focused on improving technique, physical preparation, and tactics. We had to find elements that would develop those qualities. We used car tires and even shock absorber springs" (Mesa Redonda, 2017).

Application of Scientific Methods

We want to highlight, as an example in this aspect, the importance that Professor Sagarra placed on the application of science to training moments. To this end, the technical team led by Professor Alcides Sagarra conducted a study on the invariants of content in training for the skill of ocular motility, as a premise for the boxer's performance, thereby emphasizing the importance of its function, with a view to certifying the consequences



of their training during the athlete's preparation. In a paper titled "The Boxing School as a Methodology for Developing the Perceptual Skill of Ocular Motility during Boxer Training," the following is presented, and I quote: "There are many parameters that can influence a boxer's performance, and improving any of them can significantly contribute to enhancing their output in the face of competitive challenges. Therefore, through this study, we aim to specifically improve the perceptual skill of ocular motility with general and specific boxing exercises, in order to expand the motor culture in relation to the sporting advancement of its practitioners" (Rodríguez, 2007).

Regarding his teaching methods

It is said that his methods were not pedagogical, due to the slaps he gave to the boxers and for speaking loudly to them, sometimes using non-technical language. He refers to his methodology as "pedagogical slapping." He adds that those who hit the hardest are not the boxers, but the gymnasts, to lift their spirits. He also commented that the athlete must be educated; there are slaps that go unseen, like stepping on their feet and kicking them to make them react because at certain moments it cannot be allowed for them to be out of the actions they need to perform, and they must be brought back to reality. It is also said that he never threw in the towel; he claims to prepare in conditions where throwing in the towel is not an option, because that is the most degrading thing for an athlete; they must know how to defend themselves and be prepared for that, he assured. The famous phrase by Félix Savón, "technique is technique, and without technique there is no technique," was referenced, with Savón alluding to an urban play on words. At another moment, he also commented on current Cuban boxing: "I don't like that many drop their hands. There is a lack of theory; it is too much practice. Boxers don't have the cunning they used to; they lack wisdom and the ability to land a punch effectively." It seemed that in Alcides' pedagogy there was a component of instilling certain values in men. He instilled constant teachings. He taught them that the National Anthem is always a sign of joy for all Cubans. It was known when boxing was missing from Cuban sports delegations abroad because the National Anthem was not played. It is no coincidence that this sport was referred to as the flagship of Cuban sports (Mesa Redonda, 2017).



On His Work with Values

The work with values was an inseparable part of the preparation of Cuban boxers, making these potentials effective in each member of the boxing population, influencing their ethical and moral development as well as their sports results. In other words, for this task to be truly effective, the following will be necessary:

- A genuine personal and professional commitment from coaches in the explicit task of using pedagogical practice not only to improve our boxers' motor skills but also to enhance their ethical and moral standards.
- The complex reality of our multicultural society has always demanded the use of models of this nature, which, with the necessary and timely adjustments, would be extremely useful and effective. In this regard, Professor Sagarra, A (1965), defines the following framework in his action plan:
- Formation of interests and aspirations in the form of personal, collective, and social objectives.
- Stimulating a sense of authenticity in their actions, based on sincerity, honesty, and simplicity.
- Development of self-awareness, self-knowledge, behavioral self-regulation processes, and self-evaluation in relation to others (exercises in assessment and self-assessment).
- Establishing systematic relationships with family and community to achieve unity in educational influences.

The string of successes that began at the Pan American Games in Cali, Colombia, and continued at the Olympic Games, the most demanding stage, allowed us to showcase the bravery and motor culture of our boxers, as well as the development of an altruistic personality. For this reason, a group of strategic actions was defined for the formation of responsible behavior centered on the tricyclic over station system. Based on these new developments in sports preparation, the educational needs and potentialities of the coaches were systematically organized to work on the value of responsibility through training sessions, which required:



- Knowledge and development of the value of responsibility.
- Understanding the didactics of values through training sessions.
- Use of methodological work focused on the value to be developed.

Analyze the value system to be formed, according to the determined historical context and the corresponding characterization.

These guidelines are based on the idea that "Values constitute the core of human freedom in terms of deliberate choices or strategic preferences for certain modes of action over others" (Soler Arrate, 2011).

Therefore, Professor Sagarra considered it important to debate social thought, and from his analysis, it is defined as the degree of positive significance that something has for the athlete and that provokes a stable way of acting over time. This requires the formation and consolidation of a value system in accordance with their social nature. Hence, in the sporting life of high-performance boxers, a stable orientation in this direction was necessary according to the following scheme (Figure 1).

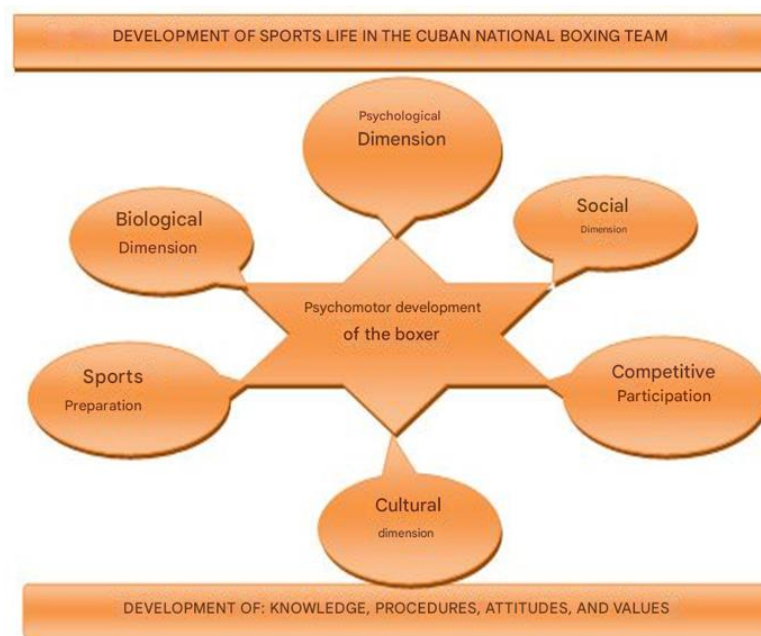


Fig. 1 - Development of the Sporting Life in the Cuban National Boxing Team



This methodological description relates to all the elements involved in sports training, not limited solely to physical repercussions, but also having a significant capacity to influence psychological (emotional) and social (relational) functions.

During the planning and management of the preparation of Cuban boxers, and specifically in the methodological preparation, it was necessary to ascertain the level of preparation of the coaches through:

- The application of the Joint Method of Methodological Training.
- Conducting educational meetings with the entire pedagogical community and staff of the National Boxing Team.
- Approval of the training objective and the values to prioritize within the hierarchical scale of the institution by the pedagogical collective.
- Conducting Methodological Meetings to analyze the deficiencies observed in addressing values and to reach agreements on utilizing other forms of methodological work with this purpose.
- Using the Joint Method of Methodological Training as a means to enhance the quality of the pedagogical process.
- Defining the team captain and their action plan (Soler Arrate, 2011).

On his work in training sessions

Psychopedagogical functions that characterized the training sessions of the Cuban national boxing team from 1968 to 2002.

The implementation of this action involved:

- Interaction with student, political, and mass organizations, as well as the community throughout the country.
- Visits from the main leaders of the country to the training sessions.
- Meetings to promote debates and exchanges of educational, sports, and social experiences.



- The organization of film discussions featuring all the speeches of Fidel Castro Ruz.
- Educational talks with prominent Heroes of Labor of the Republic of Cuba.
- Recreational and cultural festivals at the provincial, national, and international levels.
- Visits to historical sites.
- Volunteer work.
- Meetings with the lifetime presidency of the National Boxing Team, led by our Commander-in-Chief Fidel Castro Ruz.

Additionally, as part of the educational work direction, agreements were established with social institutions, production and service centers, recreational and cultural centers, educational institutions, historical sites, and other strategically important locations in the projection of the activities system of the National Boxing Team.

The implementation of these actions allowed us to develop an activity plan that facilitated coordination relationships with the Association of Combatants of the Cuban Revolution. Therefore, through collective work, the following objectives were sought:

- To implement a recreational, cultural, and sports movement that would be integrated into every aspect of the boxers' lives.
- To foster responsible behavior through interpersonal relationships and family connections.
- To assign shared responsibilities to the heads of Educational and Sports Departments in the management of grade-level assemblies.
- To conceive student assembly management with an evaluative character for its members, where reflection on self-criticism and constructive criticism is prioritized responsibly, along with encouragement for actions that align with the values being promoted.



When summarizing the objectives of the preparation of Cuban boxers, we must point out that these became more scientific since the National Boxing Team returned from the Olympic Games in Mexico in 1968. Professor Enrique Sagarra had already conceived the implementation of the first practical application of the tricyclic overtraining system, aimed at training triple Olympic champions. From this system, a more effective approach was directed, based on the relationship between objective and subjective factors, allowing the preparation system to adopt a genuine theoretical framework, favoring assessments and contradictions of a specific reflective process in the consciousness of the developing athlete.

Thus, the value of responsibility was defined as a premise for its adoption; in its dimensional character, it encompasses duty fulfillment, discipline, participation, perseverance, and decision-making, alongside norms, objectives, and interests, occupying a top hierarchical position and being formed from the beginning of life through the dynamics and development that one faces. In this way, Professor Sagarra defined that the value of responsibility should be measured in dimensions related to study, training, and social behavior, contributing to ensuring that the formative process has a methodological theoretical support that serves as a foundation for educating this value.

The value of responsibility among boxing athletes allowed for the identification of latent educational needs, serving as a basis for developing individual training, as well as fostering responsibility in athletes within the preparation system, aimed at the comprehensive development of a new type of athlete, directing activities towards a system of attitudes as detailed below:

1. Attitude towards academic improvement:

- Good promotion results.
- Attendance at study sessions.

2. Attitude towards common living norms:



- Cleaning and organizing rooms.
- Norms of formal education in the dining area.
- Attendance at evaluation check-ups.
- Appropriate demeanor and appearance.

3. Responsible attitude towards training:

- Excellent attendance results at training sessions.
- Compliance with load and volume plans outlined in training.
- Superior sports results.

Additionally, as part of the work direction, agreements were established with social institutions, production and service centers, recreational and cultural centers, educational institutions, historical sites, and other strategically important locations in projecting the activity system of the National Boxing Team (EFDeportes.com, 2011).

About Women's Boxing

Alcides Sagarra, a recognized master of Cuban and global boxing, previously shared his views on the controversy surrounding women's boxing in Cuba, which was recently officially recognized on the island after years of being unacknowledged by INDER (National Institute of Sports, Physical Education and Recreation) and the Federation. Finally, the sports authorities of the island spoke out about women's boxing in Cuba, which had been practiced without receiving the label of "official" or the support of the governing bodies of the sport. Before the approval was granted in April 2021, the iconic Sagarra had advocated for women to be able to represent the country on the international stage. He stated to *Cubadebate* "women should also go to the Tokyo Games in this discipline, although that participation did not materialize since official recognition was still needed". "Women's boxing is practiced all over the world; I don't know why it hasn't been officially recognized in Cuba yet. The claim that Vilma [Espín] did not want it is false. She believed that women had the same rights as men. She would never limit them. She always wanted the best for them." Sagarra then expressed that it was time to finalize the approval, stating, "Women go to war, stand guard, drive;



similarly, they have the right to box. Moreover, note this, journalist: This 85-year-old man believes it will happen, and it will happen well. We have lost time, medals, and the satisfaction of teaching them to fight. I hope to see them in the ring." (Play off magazine, 2022)

Achievements and Recognitions

Academically, he holds a degree in Physical Culture, graduating from the Manuel Fajardo Higher Institute of Physical Culture in 1982. He obtained a doctoral degree in Pedagogical Sciences in 1992 and served as an associate professor at the aforementioned institute and as an associate professor at the University of Computer Sciences of Cuba. On the 50th anniversary of IBA, he was proclaimed the best coach of that institution. Additionally, according to a survey conducted by the venerable Cuban magazine *Bohemia*, he was awarded the title of the best amateur boxing trainer of the entire 20th century.

CONCLUSIONS

The completion of this work allowed us to get a little closer to the figure of Alcides Sagarra and, above all, to his teaching methods aimed at ensuring the management of his human resources.

His entire sporting career has been governed by values such as responsibility and honesty.

The international sporting results of Cuban boxing were supported by the collective work led by Dr. Alcides Sagarra Carón.

He can undoubtedly be categorized as the father of the Cuban Boxing Academy.



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Conflict of interest statement:

The authors declare having competing interests.

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The authors have participated in the redaction of the manuscript and the documentary review.



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