

Farewell Editorial

The *MMJ*: A work in glowing progress

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After seven years at the helm of the *Malawi Medical Journal*, it is time to turn the editor's pen in and hand over to fresh blood. I will be stepping down as editor at the end of June 2016. The *Malawi Medical Journal (MMJ)* has gone through an exciting seven years and has grown to an impact factor of 0.837—its highest ever. My predecessor, Mzamose Gondwe, did much to establish the *MMJ* internationally and get it indexed on the ISI Web of Science. Carrying on in the shoes she left was no mean task, but the support of the editorial board—led by Prof. Eric Borgstein and Editor in Chief, Prof. Malcolm Molyneux—was immense in enabling us to stand on the shoulders of giants and take the *MMJ* to greater heights.

Over the seven years, the *MMJ* has had to navigate the challenges many journals face, especially with rising print costs. The support of the University of Malawi College of Medicine has been tremendous in getting print issues out, as was the financial support we received for printing through our partners the Medical Association of Malawi (MAM), via the National AIDS Commission (NAC), who provided us with a printing grant over two years. In 2015 we became an exclusively online journal. Given the local context in which we operate and the objective of the *MMJ* to “stimulate dialogue amongst researchers and health professionals in Malawi through information that will aid daily practice, lifelong learning, and career development,” hard copies are essential in district hospitals and rural health centres, where Internet access is a challenge. We are trying to revive print copies in addition to our online edition so that the reach of the *MMJ* is far wider.

The thread of the successes of the *MMJ* while I have been editor has been the African Journal Partnership Project (AJPP). This programme is a collaboration between international journals partnered with several African journals. The programme is funded by the US National Library of Medicine and National Institutes of Health.¹ Its primary aim is to increase the visibility and quality of the African journals. African health journals have for a time been almost “invisible” on the international stage.² The *MMJ* is partnered with the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)*. The collaboration with *JAMA* has resulted in three site visits to see the work of *JAMA* and receive technical as well as editorial advice and assistance.³ I am grateful to *JAMA*'s Annette Flanagan, an AJPP co-director, who has been a pillar of strength and passionate supporter of the *MMJ*.

The AJPP has assisted with funding for our desk editor as well as student intern. It has helped provide computer equipment and funding for our new website. It has funded our online submission system as well as the necessary technical support for it. The annual meetings of the AJPP have been forums for learning, exchange of ideas, and improved quality in recognition of increasing plagiarism and fraud in scientific writing. These meetings have provided us the opportunity to participate in the sharing of enormous resources to help with editorial management. The *MMJ* hosted the 2015 meeting in Bvumbwe and Blantyre.⁴ At the most recent AJPP meeting in Denver, USA, in May 2016, inspired by a suggestion from *African Health Sciences* Editor in Chief, Prof. James Tumwine, the group decided that the final *P* in AJPP will now stand for *Programme*, to signify the AJPP's progression into a well-established and fruitful collaboration that continues to grow from strength to strength.

The result of the AJPP: *MMJ* submissions have soared from 42 in 2008 to over 150 in 2015. We are now indexed amongst others on: PubMed, PubMed Central (PMC), Bioline International, Thomson Reuters, and African Journals Online (AJOL). We have run several successful workshops on journal writing skills, peer review, and science communication for journalists. We have developed a close working relationship with the ICT department at the College and have scanned all our back issues for AJOL, PMC, and Bioline. The Malawi National Archives are also in receipt of past *MMJ* publications. On the social media front, we have an active Facebook Page, are on Twitter, and have a blog (which is in need of revamping). We have been an active presence at numerous locally held health conferences. The intern concept is working very well, and the passion, dedication, and commitment of Andrew Mataya has been phenomenal for the journal. I am also very grateful to him.

The past seven years have not been without challenges. Apart from increased printing costs, printing delays, and minimal subscriptions and sales for the journal, the visibility of the *MMJ* with local institutions has been wanting. Where did I fall short? One glaring omission in my tenure has been the lack of a regular editorial section. The *MMJ* is very much still a work in progress. Its new cover design and forthcoming new sections will take it even further beyond 1.00 for an impact factor. I have learnt so much and worked with an excellent team. The dedication of our desk editor, Thengo Kavinya, has been tremendous, and he has helped hold the journal together over the seven years I have been with the *MMJ*. I am indebted to him and deeply grateful. As I hand over to the new editor, Dr. Lucinda Manda-Taylor, I am confident the journal is in excellent hands. She has been a dedicated and reliable editorial board member and will take the journal even further so that the *MMJ* work in glowing progress will glow all the brighter in the years to come.

References

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