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## GUEST EDITORIAL

### A new publishing platform and model for *South African Family Practice*

There is no doubt that there are considerably more challenges to a scholarly journal published in 2014 than simply preparing a paper copy that is timeously posted to its readership. We say this with great respect because not so long ago all our efforts were consolidated to achieve only that. However, printing a journal took much longer, and the publishing process was entirely streamlined in accordance with printing deadlines.

These days we “simply” upload the final electronic files onto an File Transfer Protocol (FTP) site, the printers carry out the impositioning (usually within a working day), we approve the journal online at our offices, and the printers produce the four, separate, colour printing plates directly from the electronic files. Sixteen pages, eight on each side, are then inpositioned for one sheet of paper so that the first eight pages are printed together with the last eight pages in a staple-bound journal like *South African Family Practice (SAFP)*. Each full-colour page passes through the printing process four times, and each time a different colour is printed on the same page, on top of one another, and perfectly registered so that each plate contributes its colour imprint to the full-colour image on the pages. Seven days later, we can have the printed journal in hand.

Forgive the continued reminiscence and over-simplification of the process, but few people have an appreciation of the process involved in producing printing plates. Direct-to-plate or platesetter technology is quite new, and until fairly recently, offset lithography printing was the traditional way of producing printing plates, whereby film was produced on an “image setter”, and the film then used to make the metal printing plates. To produce the film, a photographic process was used to take a photo of the colour pages, which were separated into four colours and imposed onto the four, colour films. The printers created a blueprint proof using dye lines, the four plates and a blueish ink. After that, a loosely bound copy was sent to the publishers so that they could check the inpositioning, and we could obtain some idea of whether or not the colours would print correctly. Later, colour proofs could be produced, but on average, it would take 4–6 weeks or longer to get the journal printed than it does today. So gone are the days of sending “trannies”, “possies”, slides, photographs, “floppies”, “stiffies” and CDs to the printers in order to produce films, and then plates.

After all of this, you may ask: “How important is it to still print *SAFP*, even though only the abstracts of the original articles feature in the hard copies, since the articles are published on an open-access, highly discoverable meta-tagged platform, and will soon be available via a ‘mobile app’?” Apart from the advertising potential, which is increasingly under tremendous pressure, printing 5 000 copies of the journal, and posting them, is an important service that *SAFP* can offer authors

which no other international and/or electronic journal is able to accomplish, in terms of providing authors with exposure to South African readership and peers. The printed form is tangible and wireless. No electricity, Wi-Fi, 3G, 4G, ADSL and broadband needed. No glaring screen either.

However, today the challenge lies in ensuring that final electronic proofs are published online as early as possible, and to make sure that the articles are highly discoverable so that they can generate as many citations as early as possible. The latter involves speeding up the peer-review process and producing portable document format (PDF) galley proofs. But publishing the article’s version of record (VoR) online first, before it is paginated for a printed journal edition, is what is really needed. The VoR used to be citeable only once pagination has occurred. Introducing digital object identifiers (DOIs) so that the articles can be published with a permanent web reference that will not expire and which can be cited is what makes online-first publication possible. The good news is that we will soon start publishing the unsolicited articles online, and will then create a print edition a little later. And as soon as we have published our 50-article backlog, we should be able to publish the articles online within four weeks once they have been accepted for publication. We hope to accomplish this new workflow and service by January 2015.

In addition, the electronic platform has moved to a new state-of-the art international publishing platform (Taylor and Francis), through which we can offer authors properly meta-tagged, published articles. We will soon move our submission office to the Editorial Manager® platform. An author publishing charge will be introduced for all new, unsolicited submissions. South African Academy of Family Physicians (SAAFP) paid-up members will only pay R2 500 to publish in *SAFP*. Non-SAAFP members will pay R5 000, and international members \$750 per accepted original article for publication. Fees will double from 2015, in line with most South African scientific journals that charge publication fees. Our publication fees will still be cheaper than those of most journals charging per page of an accepted article. Author publishing charges will not apply to commissioned review articles.

The publisher personally thanks Pierre de Villiers and his successor, Gboyega Ogunbanjo, for their vision and leadership in helping us to devise a new publishing model, and for their continued support and friendship following 10 years of publishing the *SAFP* journal for the SAAFP.

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