

A new broom?



We all have a number of connotations or images we associate with a 'new broom'. Is it to be used to sweep out the old, replacing all with the new, irrespective of the worth of the old? Is the new broom to be used judiciously, to tidy up and spring clean? Or should the new broom be kept in the cupboard, only to be used in emergencies? There is no doubt in my mind that I have taken over the editorship of the *South African Journal of Child Health* (SAJCH) at a time when it is a vibrant and strong member of the stable of journals produced under the auspices of the South African Medical Association, a position which it has attained largely through the hard work and enthusiasm of Prof. Dankwart Wittenberg, the Journal's editor for the past 4 years. Certainly, I don't have the vision of the broom needing to be used in the Herculean task of cleaning out the Augean stables. I would like to thank Dankwart on behalf of child health professionals throughout low- to middle-income countries and South Africa (SA) in particular for the effort and time he has put into the Journal over the last number of years to leave it in the state that I find it.

Having said that, however, there are a number of challenges facing the Journal, the foremost of which, I believe, is ensuring that the publication has relevance and a niche in the future digital age, an issue highlighted by the *South African Medical Journal* editor in her editorial of September this year.^[1] Why should researchers publish in our Journal and why should child health professionals in SA read the articles? How do we compete with international paediatric journals, whose articles are readily retrievable from cyber-libraries such as PubMed and Web of Science?

We have to accept that top clinical research, even if of significant clinical relevance locally, will always be submitted first to international journals with high impact factors, as that will ensure that the research is seen and read by relevant research peers internationally, will enhance the international status of the authors and their affiliated universities, and will help to attract future research funding. So what is our niche? I believe the Journal has two important roles to play: firstly, to provide a repository for sound clinical research, which might not necessarily be innovative, but is highly relevant to SA and other low- to middle-income countries; and secondly, to give registrars a vehicle in which they are able to publish their MMed short reports, if these reports meet the standards of the Journal review process, and emerging clinician scientists the opportunity to experience and learn from the process of article submission, review, revision and hopefully publication. A related role of the Journal should be to give senior registrars the opportunity to review articles under the watchful eye and mentorship of more senior researchers.

In order to be an attractive vehicle for publication of SA research, and particularly of registrar MMed research, the turnaround time between submission and receipt of a reviewer's

comments together with the editor's decision should be kept as short as possible. International journals for which I review frequently give possible reviewers only 48 h in which to indicate their willingness to review the submission, and 2 weeks in which to complete and return the review. The result is that the average time from submission to first editorial decision is 30 days. It is clear that the SAJCH cannot brag at having such excellent turnaround times; in fact, one of the major challenges facing the Journal is the reluctance of some SA clinicians to either accept the request to review for the Journal or to return the review within an acceptable time, without the editor having to remind reviewers of their outstanding reviews. One does understand that SA academic paediatricians are a relatively small group, whose time is being requested by their patients, hospital management structures and provincial and national health departments, their undergraduate and postgraduate students, university and faculty management committees, and, if they have time, their research activities and supervision. However, I do believe that their support of an SA journal specifically dealing with child health research and issues is of vital importance, not only so that we are able to encourage and develop young paediatricians interested in clinical research, but also to keep our child healthcare professionals informed of research developments.

The argument that it is pointless publishing in the SAJCH as the articles are not accessed by the major digital libraries and therefore are not available to researchers elsewhere in the world is no longer tenable. The SAJCH is included in Scopus and in Google Scholar, and all articles are available as open access through SciELO SA.^[2] We would therefore like to encourage all interested readers to ensure that they receive the Table of Contents of each issue on publication so that they are able to keep up to date, by registering their email address on the Journal website (<http://www.sajch.org.za/index.php/SAJCH>).

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