

Participation, Professionalism, and the Quiet Work of Growing Knowledge

SADJ NOVEMBER 2025, Vol. 80 No.10 P519-P520

Prof NH Wood, Managing Editor, SADJ – BChD, DipOdont(MFP), MDent(OMP), FCD(SA), PhD

As 2025 draws to a close, the South African Dental Journal stands at a moment of both gratitude and reflection. This has been a year marked by remarkable engagement from across the profession: clinicians submitting clinical techniques and case series; academics forwarding original research; postgraduate students venturing into their first publications; and reviewers, our unsung custodians of rigour, giving their time generously to appraise, challenge, refine, and strengthen the manuscripts entrusted to us.

In the past twelve months, the SADJ has received more submissions than in any recent year. This is a milestone worth celebrating. It signals not only increased scholarly productivity, but a profession willing to invest in its collective intellectual capital. In a time where the pressures on clinical dentistry are substantial, and academic workloads continue to swell, participation in the scholarly process is no small act, it is a demonstration of commitment to the discipline, to the evidence base that underpins practice, and to the future practitioners who rely on accurate, credible, ethically reviewed information.

Yet more submissions also mean more work. Turnaround times have lengthened, not because of inefficiency or neglect, but because rigour takes time. The peer review process, double-blinded, methodologically attentive, ethically anchored, remains the backbone of the SADJ's identity. We do not compromise on that. Each submission, whether a simple technique note or a major original investigation, receives the same quality-assurance scrutiny; each is read critically, reviewed independently, and judged against the standards expected of reputable international journals as we continue to grow and develop our journals profile and standing.

This is a promise we renew every year.

As many readers will have noticed, turnaround times for manuscript decisions have lengthened this year. This is not due to reduced efficiency, but rather to a significant rise in the number of submissions and, in some cases, delayed or declined reviews from external experts. High-quality peer review is the backbone of scholarly publishing, but it is also increasingly difficult to secure promptly, particularly in a profession where academic, clinical, and supervisory workloads continue to escalate. When reviewers withdraw, delay, or decline to complete a report, the editorial office must restart the process, sometimes multiple times, to uphold the standards expected of a credible scientific journal. These realities inevitably influence timelines, and we appreciate the patience of authors who await decisions under such circumstances. We acknowledge the inconvenience and are addressing these as we grow and develop.

As journals grow in stature, so too do the expectations placed upon them. With an expanding readership and a more diverse

pool of submissions, the SADJ continues to refine its editorial processes and strengthen the calibre of its peer review. This includes identifying and inviting reviewers with deeper expertise, ensuring methodological scrutiny is more robust, and offering authors clearer, more constructive, and higher-quality feedback across clinical, scientific, and educational domains. We have already seen a noticeable improvement in the depth and quality of reviewer reports, reflecting a deliberate effort to provide authors with richer critique and to elevate the standard of work suitable for publication. Such growth is intentional. Improving reviewer expertise not only enhances the scientific validity of the articles we publish, but also supports the professional development of our authors by giving them access to meaningful guidance that strengthens their scholarship. A rising journal must lift the standards of everyone involved, authors, reviewers, and editors alike, and we remain committed to that upward trajectory.

In rare circumstances, extended reviewer delays can compromise the integrity of the editorial process. When reviewers do not complete reports despite accepting the invitation, or when repeated attempts to secure expertise are unsuccessful, manuscripts may face rejection, not because of their quality, but because the journal cannot ethically or indefinitely sustain a stalled process. These decisions are never taken lightly. They reflect the reality that timely evaluation is part of maintaining a functioning scholarly platform. We take these rare occurrences seriously and will always try to find a resolution for such works. Authors can assist greatly by ensuring their manuscripts are carefully prepared and by suggesting qualified reviewers, while reviewers support the profession by honouring deadlines or declining promptly when they are unable to assist. A well-functioning peer review ecosystem depends on this mutual respect.

But honest reflection requires us also to acknowledge the pressures within the system. The majority of reviewers serve voluntarily. Many are already stretched by teaching, clinical service, and postgraduate supervision. Their work, painstaking, thoughtful, and often invisible, deserves the strongest appreciation. To each reviewer, advertiser, contributor, and supporting institution: thank you. The SADJ endures because you believe in the value of scholarly participation.

Participation as Professional Citizenship

Publishing is not merely an academic exercise; it is an act of professional citizenship. It signals a willingness to test ideas against evidence, to contribute to collective learning, to invite critique, and to accept refinement. It strengthens not only the profession's knowledge frontier, but its culture of honesty, accountability, and transparency.

- A profession that publishes grows.
- A profession that reviews grows wisely.
- A profession that participates grows together.



But there is another dimension we must speak to honestly. Every editor, in every journal in the world, encounters a particular category of submission: the manuscript accompanied by the expectation of special treatment. Occasionally, we receive firm demands for expedited review because the author is perceived as an influential or authoritative figure. It might happen that we are told that their contribution is “urgent,” or that the review process “should not apply” because the author is distinguished, or visible, or has served in certain academic roles.

Let us address this respectfully and directly:

All authors are equal at the point of submission.

Titles, positions, and profiles do not and cannot determine editorial decisions. Academic rank does not exempt any manuscript from methodological scrutiny, ethical evaluation, or critical peer review. The SADJ's responsibility is to the profession as a whole, and to the scientific record, not to the preferences or expectations of any individual, however esteemed.

Indeed, the true hallmark of academic maturity is the willingness to submit one's work, no matter one's rank to the same standards that govern everyone else. Leadership in dentistry is not demonstrated by bypassing the system, but by modelling respect for it. And to be clear: every submission is valued, whether from a first-time postgraduate student or a longstanding academic. But value does not mean exemption; it means engagement. It means leaning into the process that strengthens the work, even when it is uncomfortable.

If anything, senior figures should exemplify humility in scholarship. They set the tone for the next generation. When seasoned academics work respectfully and patiently within the editorial process, they teach juniors that rigour is a virtue, not an inconvenience.

Safeguarding a Credible and Proudly African Journal

As we grow, it becomes even more important that our processes remain transparent, fair, defensible, and insulated from influence, formal or informal. Our standards are aligned with those expected of scholarly journals globally. We continue to uphold and develop:

- Double-blinded peer review
- Ethics compliance checks
- Methodological soundness assessments
- Plagiarism and originality verification

Editorial independence from institutional or personal pressure. These are not bureaucratic hurdles; they are the architecture of trust. They are what make the SADJ a credible platform worthy of national and international readership. Maintaining these standards during a period of high submission volume is demanding, but it is necessary. Quality must never become the casualty of quantity.

A Final Reflection for 2025

As we close the year, we extend deep gratitude to:

- our authors, for generating and sharing the knowledge that nourishes the profession;
- our reviewers, for their meticulous work and intellectual generosity;
- our advertisers and partners, whose support sustains the infrastructure of publication;
- our readers, who continue to engage, critique, and apply what is published.

To our editorial and production teams: thank you for your unwavering commitment, meticulous attention to detail, and the countless hours spent ensuring each issue meets the standards expected of a national scientific journal. Your expertise, patience, and professionalism are the quiet engine behind every published page.

To SADA as an organisation: thank you for your steadfast support, strategic guidance, and continued investment in the SADJ's mission. Your partnership strengthens our ability to serve the profession, uphold scientific integrity, and sustain a journal that reflects the best of South African dentistry.

In a profession where clinical demands can overshadow scholarly life, participation in academic publishing becomes a quiet act of stewardship. You help grow the knowledge frontier. You strengthen the discipline's integrity. You shape dentistry's future.

Let us carry this spirit into 2026: collaborative, thoughtful, committed to excellence, and grounded in the shared belief that publishing, done well, is one of the most powerful ways we contribute to the health of the profession.

The SADJ remains your journal.

- A place for evidence.
- A home for scholarship.
- A platform for growth.
- And above all, a collective endeavour, stronger because of your participation.