

A labour of love: 'No schools for medical editors'

To the Editor: The editorial 'No schools for medical editors'^[1] struck a personal chord. The lot of the journal editor can indeed be lonely. The challenge of dealing with the manuscripts of colleagues, friends and associates is often fraught with difficulty, especially if one is based at an academic institution where many potential contributors are likely to reside. I have been discipline editor for the *Journal of Clinical Pathology*, a BMJ group journal based in London, for the past seven years, and have witnessed a substantial growth of open access publishing and also a more sensible view of the impact factor. It is heartening to note that the *SAMJ* is still open access and does not charge the equivalent of US\$3 000 demanded by its international peers and has maintained a healthy impact factor. Much of this may be attributable to its unique blend that manages to retain readership, especially among the widely dispersed and often academically influential South African 'medical diaspora'. The *SAMJ* is possibly one of the few mechanisms whereby expatriates can get a sense of what is happening back home in the medical and clinical arena. Open access also means that articles are likely to be accessed, read and therefore cited more readily. This has not escaped the attention of our research-intensive universities where open access publishing in international journals is being encouraged and authors are able to recoup the open access charge from the DOHET subsidy (if the university cedes a substantial proportion of the subsidy to the authors, which is not always the case!).

The editor must also rely on the generosity of reviewers for the time taken to review articles; this is clearly a labour of love among reviewers – and the love is frequently lost in many instances! Often the editor becomes dependent on a few knowledgeable and charitable reviewers. Perhaps there should be an innovative reward system developed for such reviewers? Some journals award CPD points for reviewing, which encourages timely and thoughtful reviewing.

The issue of journal metrics is contentious, similar to the debates over university ranking systems. For decades, the impact factor developed by Eugene Garfield, just like the Times Higher Education system, has dominated the bibliometric landscape. It is important for authors, researchers and administrators to take a broad view of journal metrics when making an assessment, as one would do with university rankings. Of course, the game played by journal editors is similar to that played by university administrators to enhance rankings, and naturally only players can win! In the SCImago journal rankings where it is placed in the Medicine (misc) category, the *SAMJ* has a respectable H index of 33 and is in the company of journals such as the *American Journal of Forensic Medicine and Pathology*, *BMC Cell Biology*, *Israel Medical Association Journal*, and *Science Translational Medicine*.

For the editor, the job is clearly a labour of love. Modern technology such as push email from systems such as Blackberry, iPhone etc.,

may have made the job of the modern journal editor easier than it was decades ago. However, it also means that the editor is often permanently 'wired-in' to the journal, even while on holiday. So the editor's job is not only lonely, but also, thanks to the intrusions of modern technology, remains a labour of love.

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1. Seggie J. There are no schools for medical editors. *S Afr Med J* 2013;103(2):65-66. [<http://dx.doi.org/10.7196/SAMJ.6618>]

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