

## Milestones for the *AJHPE* – what have we achieved in four years?

When the *African Journal of Health Professions Education* was launched in 2009, we set out to achieve the following:

‘The *AJHPE* is an open access peer-reviewed journal which focuses on disseminating research results of work focusing on the education of health professionals, specifically, but not exclusively, in Africa.’

Using this statement of intent as a yardstick, it is useful to reflect on the milestones achieved (or not) in the first four years of publication. The first milestone for any journal has to be visibility in the international community. In this regard, we have done exceptionally well. We were picked up on the international ‘radar’ within 18 months, in a review article focusing on medical education in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). The paper was published in *Medical Education*, a top-rated international health professions education journal.<sup>[1]</sup>

‘Despite these efforts, medical education as a specialty or research focus for faculty staff is still not frequently described in the literature. We were able to identify only one journal dedicated to the broader study of health professions education in SSA: the *African Journal of Health Professions Education*, established in 2009.’

The second most important milestone for any journal is a clear commitment to its target authors and audience. So, are we a voice for all the health professions or are we just another ‘medical education’ journal populated by papers dealing largely with the education of medical students and doctors? To date, we have published the work of health sciences professionals from 21 disciplines and even the work of health sciences students. The professions other than medicine include nursing, dentistry, physiotherapy, speech and language disorders, human nutrition, radiography, emergency care, medical scientists, medical anthropologists, biostatistics and bioethics. These data speak clearly of an active policy to promote the publication of work across the full spectrum of healthcare professionals.

The third mandate of our journal is to represent the academic voice of SSA. So, are we just a South African journal that lays claim to a broader African footprint – or are we serving our mandate? While this has proven to be a challenge for the editorial team, who are working hard at bringing non-South African work into a very competitive market, we have made substantial progress. We’ve published work from 13 African countries representing 26 health sciences institutions; this represents almost a quarter of all SSA ‘medical schools’ that responded to the largest medical school survey in SSA – The sub-Saharan African Medical School Study (SAMSS) conducted in 2009.<sup>[2]</sup> While we have a long way to go, it is clear that providing extra support and guidance for entry-level authors places publication status within their reach. It is worth noting that non-SA authors have featured particularly well in the genre of short papers or abstracts. This is an indication of the preliminary nature of much of the work, but such is the road to scholarship, and this journal clearly plays a key role in the process. These data demonstrate that short reports (up to 1 500 words, 1 figure or table, and 5 references) have a real role to play in the development of novice authors and should not be abandoned in the *AJHPE*.

While our African footprint is clear, one could ask whether the quality of work that we publish has attracted any writers from outside Africa? Again, the answer is a pleasant surprise. We have attracted authors from leading

universities in North America (Duke University, the University of Michigan, Columbia University, the University of Toronto, McMaster University, Manitoba University), the UK (Leeds University, Liverpool University, Aberdeen University) and as far afield as Australia (Flinders University). The real excitement about the participation of these universities is that they have all written in partnership with an African university, often outside South Africa; this speaks of empowerment rather than colonisation.

Another goal expressed in the statement of intent was to discuss issues particularly relevant to SSA, i.e. the developing world. A useful measure of the extent to which this has been achieved is to glance at the titles of the guest editorials. We have touched on the need for a health professions education journal for SSA, reasons for writing about health professions education in Africa, making an educational difference in the world, the concept of social accountability, and the human resource issues affecting healthcare in Africa.

Before I close, we need to reflect on the future of the *AJHPE*. A key determinant of survival in the publishing world is the academic status of a journal. As many of our readers and authors will know, we were accredited by the Department of Higher Education and Training in 2012 and we are now a subsidy-generating journal. This might already have had an impact on the journal because we have trebled our submissions and doubled our publication output in the past 12 months! So, the academic viability of the journal has been established and the upward trajectory is one that needs to be maintained and supported. Accordingly, we look forward to receiving many more submissions from more diverse health professions representing more institutions of higher learning from more countries on this continent in 2014.

And finally, what exciting developments lie ahead in 2014? Since our inception, we have been fully supported by the Health and Medical Publishing Group in conjunction with the South African Medical Association. This has been an extremely successful relationship, as documented in this editorial. As of 2014, we will be funded by the Foundation for Professional Development, an education provider with whom many of you may be familiar. The organisation has an excellent track record as a provider of high-quality health professionals training courses and other CPD activities, and I believe that this sets the stage for new opportunities in the year to come!

I wish all readers and perusers a time of rest and rejuvenation in the coming weeks, and an academically and professionally successful and challenging 2014.

**Vanessa Burch**

*Editor-in-Chief*

*African Journal of Health Professions Education*

1. Greysen SR, Dovlo D, Olapade-Olaopa EO, Jacobs M, Mullan SF. Medical education in sub-Saharan Africa: A literature review. *Med Educ* 2011;45:973-986.
2. Mullan F, Frehywort A, Omaswa F, et al. Medical schools in sub-Saharan Africa. *Lancet* 2011;277:1113-1121.



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