

Editorial

So long, farewell, *auf wiedersehen*, but not goodbye



Date Received: 11 March 2019

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<https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/mmj.v31i1.1>

Dear Colleagues,

This is my “so long, farewell, *au Wiedersehen*, but not goodbye” editorial letter to you, our authors and readers of the Malawi Medical Journal (MMJ). In July 2016, I assumed the role of the Editor-in-Chief (EiC) of the MMJ, Malawi’s only medical journal and, if you do not already know, one of the leading medical journals in sub-Saharan Africa. Just to put it into perspective for you, in 2016, the SCImago Institutions Rankings (SIR) placed the MMJ in 4th position in Africa for journals that publish in the field of medicine.

Naturally, I came to this task with great trepidation because I had no experience in running and managing a medical journal and I had very little knowledge in the editorial processes, despite having served as a peer reviewer and editorial board member. There was a steep learning curve and, for a while, I internally wrestled with whether I would manage to captain the ship and keep it on course. Thankfully, I had Dr. Andrew Mataya (Deputy Editor) and Mr. Thengo Kavinya (Managing Editor), to show me the ropes.

Once I settled into the role, I immediately defined and shared by priorities, targets and goals with the editorial team, all of which were aimed at building upon the excellent work of my predecessors: Professor Malcolm Molyneux, Dr. Muza Gondwe and Dr. Chiwoza Bandawe. You see, I was extremely fortunate to be inheriting a publication that had many of the essential ingredients in place namely: the editorial tools, processes and systems. All I needed to do was to continue improving on this foundation laid before me.

One of the key things I quickly realized was that, to remain current and relevant, the journal needed to keep pace with technology and good publishing and sharing practices. So first, we needed to maintain the high standards and publish regionally relevant and scientifically informative research adhering to credible scientific and ethics procedures and good publishing practices. We had to do this while treading the fine line of building the capacity of early career or junior researchers who may not have the proper publishing experiences that a seasoned researcher has. Second, we needed to embrace the use of social media platforms to establish the journal’s online presence and visibility. Third, we needed to update our website and add an Online First system to upload online manuscripts shortly after their acceptance. Fourth, we needed to enlist more help by recruiting associate editors from all over the world, thereby growing our editorial team, and simultaneously updating and expanding our reviewer database with the help of ScholarOne.

Setting targets and achieving them has not been easy. There have been some challenges and setbacks, including the resignation of two key people: Dr. Andrew Mataya and most

recently, Dr. Yohane Gadama (Intern). In spite of these setbacks, we have accomplished so much in the past two and a half years that I spent managing the journal, starting with the obvious; the journal metrics. The impact factor soared from 0.863 for 2016 to 1.123 for 2017! We increased our visibility and social media presence. We ran campaigns commemorating World AIDS Day, World Stroke Day and assembled a virtual collection that highlighted articles previously published by the MMJ. We engaged with potential authors at conferences and workshops. We expanded our outreach and established a student-run MMJ journal club at the University of Malawi College of Medicine, to build the capacity of students by teaching them how to engage with research articles. We also hosted a number of training workshops in collaboration with the volunteers from the Elsevier Foundation’s “Research without Borders” program and the College of Medicine Research Support Centre (RSC). Through the Elsevier’s network ties with the African Journals Partnership Program (AJPP), we were lucky to have five very talented women who volunteered two weeks of their time to visit the MMJ editorial team at various points during my tenure as EiC, namely: Ms. Cynthia Clark (New York), Ms. Shalimar Shadeed (Jordan), Ms. Jayne Dawkins (Philadelphia), Ms. Hoglah Dasari (India) and Ms. Rosanna Diogini (UK) Each volunteer provided us with very valuable tools and tips for the success of the journal.

These highlighted achievements would also not be possible if I did not have the support of the Editorial Board and, therefore, thanks are also due to them for the guidance they offered me, but particularly for the trust they had in me to run and manage the journal. I also cannot forget to mention the individuals on the editorial team for pulling weight and putting in a lot of effort into making sure that articles are reviewed, typeset and posted online. However, I have to single out one individual, Mr. Fanuel Bickton (Intern), who fast became my right-hand person as we worked closely to fulfill many of the editorial tasks. I am also very thankful for the support of Annette Flanagan, Executive Managing Editor of the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) and Co-Director of AJPP, personal friend and mentor. Your support made me flourish.

I step down as the EiC with a great sense of assuredness that the journal is in good hands. My successor, Professor Adamson S. Muula is a seasoned teacher, researcher, and author, and has many years of work experience with the MMJ. I know that the journal will continue to flourish. I step down but will continue to serve the journal as an Editorial Board Member. So this, indeed, is not goodbye.