

It's time to move on ...



JEMDSA, the official journal of the Society for Endocrinology, Metabolism and Diabetes of South Africa (SEMDSA), has been associated with the South African Medical Association and published by the Health and Medical Publishing Group (HMPG) since its inception more than a decade ago. Now the Society has decided that it is time for a change, and as of 2009 *JEMDSA* will be published by a private publishing house, Medpharm Publications.

What are the reasons for the proposed change? Periodic tensions between publisher and editors are inevitable. The relationship between *JEMDSA*'s editors and publisher has however always been exemplary – it certainly had no bearing on the decision to change publisher, and Dan, JP, Emma and the rest of the team deserve praise and sincere appreciation!

The main reason why I support the change is because *JEMDSA* has never developed into a fully fledged scientific journal, independent of the *South African Medical Journal (SAMJ)*. Although many reasons for this may exist, I have little doubt that our dual publication policy to ensure international indexing has contributed significantly. Since every quality paper worthy of indexing in world data bases like Medline first has to be published in *SAMJ*, and carries a footnote to this effect, the perception has evolved that *JEMDSA* is nothing more than a society magazine that publishes articles originally earmarked for publication in *SAMJ*. This is clearly not conducive to independent growth and development. A second conundrum involves the selection of articles for publication in *SAMJ*. Whereas the *SAMJ* editors obviously have a responsibility to provide their readers with relevant, quality articles of general interest, it is precisely those articles of lesser general interest (exceptional endocrine case studies, good basic research, etc.) for which we seek indexing. Finally, journal ownership, financial viability issues and other factors including the subjective 'need for a change' probably also contributed to some extent.

So, now that the decision has been made, where do we go from here?

- The current situation provides an ideal opportunity for the Society to take stock, to rethink and then to formulate the vision, mission, scope and essential aim(s) of its journal. *JEMDSA* has never quite succeeded in becoming the official mouthpiece of SEMDSA, as it should be. Moreover, SEMDSA and its members have a long, proud history of being able to discuss and deliberate sensitive and contentious issues in a constructive (albeit feisty and often passionate) fashion. It is my contention that a viable society journal could go a long way to bridge differences that cannot always wait for the next Society AGM.

- SEMDSA serves as umbrella organisation for a large number of other societies, organisations and interest groups, including NOFSA, LASSA, SASSO, DESSA, etc. The willingness of these organisations, including some new kids on the block like SA PAEDS, to utilise, support and take ownership of *JEMDSA* will have to be ascertained.
- The establishment of a new Editorial Board is crucial. The appointment of an Editor-in-Chief, a Deputy Editor and a Managing/Technical Editor seems obvious, but we need to be more innovative if our journal is to survive amid serious competition. The appointment of a sizeable Editorial Board including International Members/Editors, as well as Associate/Section Editors who would be responsible for the different sections of endocrinology, metabolism, diabetes, osteology, lipids, paediatrics, obesity, etc., deserves our attention.
- Revise the journal structure. Other than the standard editorials, review articles, research papers, case studies, protocols for debate and congress abstracts, we need to make more use of national and international guidelines, congress reports and letters to the editor.
- Establishing a journal structure is one thing, but ensuring sufficient material is another. Whereas I accept that original research articles cannot be 'manufactured', I am equally convinced that good planning can 'ensure' adequate editorials, review articles, cases and so on, and envisage a major role for the Associate Editors to ensure adequate material in their section.
- Determine the business model for membership and subscriptions.
- Develop the journal website (www.JEMDSA.co.za) and plan the web-based and hard copy-based components of the journal.
- Revise or confirm instructions to authors, editorial policy and advertising policy. These issues were often simply inherited from *SAMJ/HMPG* but require attention.
- Decide on a new-look cover and layout.
- *JEMDSA* to be the congress journal of SEMDSA, and hopefully others.
- Whereas *JEMDSA* is currently accredited by the Department of Education for government subsidisation, we clearly need to work towards international recognition and indexing.

There is undoubtedly much planning and much work to be done, but current interest in the new *JEMDSA* is high and its future appears to be bright.

We welcome any suggestions to improve *your* journal.

Stephen Hough
Scientific Editor