



## The journal: a change at the helm

This is my last editorial in *South African Family Practice*, since my term finally expired on 31 December 2011, after 13 years. I can remember how Sam Fehrsen, a former editor, always used to talk about “the journal”, and so we all followed. To me, this is a term of endearment, respect, and recognition of the important role it played in the development of the discipline of family medicine.

I assumed the role of editor-in-chief in 1999, and found the journal to be in a difficult situation. Sam Fehrsen had left in 1996, and for two years, it had several caretaker editors, including Roy Jobson, Russel Kirkby, and a number of “guest editors” to whom different issues were assigned. In the last few years prior to 1996, the journal had an excellent CME section, under the brilliant leadership of Chris Ellis (remember “teaching old docs new tricks”?). In those days, the concept of CPD was still new, and opportunities were few.

In the period 1997-1998, it would be fair to say that the journal lost focus because of the lack of stable leadership, and it probably ran the risk of being terminated. In 1998, only three issues were published (it used to be a monthly journal). During this time, the South African Academy of Family Practice/Primary Care (Academy) was also in an existential crisis, and there was considerable talking and lobbying to “merge” the College of Family Practitioners with the Academy, to form an independent “College of Family Medicine” (which never happened).

It was a long-time dream of mine to become the editor of the journal! I was offered the opportunity to be a guest editor in January 1999, became “hooked”, and offered to do the job. My first editorial<sup>1</sup> described the turmoil of, and hopes for, family medicine at the time. Readers may be interested to know that the national chairman of the Academy also wrote a letter to the editor, published on the next page, commenting on, and “objecting” to some of my expressed opinions in the editorial (which certainly was my own). It feels like *déjà vu* to me, as I described much of the same situation in my most recent editorial.

I do not want to leave the journal on a note of despair, and by pointing out the problems. We have achieved so much!

Our achievements include the following:

- The journal is accredited by the National Department of Higher Education and Training, affording universities an opportunity to earn millions of rands every year, by publishing original research in the journal
- In 2003, a merger with *Geneeskunde* strengthened the journal, resulting in a regular strong CPD section, offered by Medpharm Publications (the new publisher)

- In 2005, the journal became the first South African scholarly journal to go fully online, with a full manuscript management system (virtual publishing office)
- The journal now offers a strong peer-reviewed original research section, publishes 42 articles each year, and has a good six-month pipeline of research articles
- In print, it is distributed to more than 5 000 family doctors (including free copies to Academy members) bi-monthly, while more than 10 000 people visit its website ([www.safpj.co.za](http://www.safpj.co.za)) every month, generating more than 50 000 page impressions per month
- Soon, the journal's archive material, spanning 30 years, will be freely available online (this will be my final service to the journal).

I need to thank many people for their support during my term:

- The authors who considered our journal to be worthy of their work, and accepted my final, and sometimes harsh, judgement
- The reviewers who gave their time and expertise freely to evaluate manuscripts, and contribute to the quality of the journal content
- The publishers with whom I worked: Diane Perrett of Campaign Concepts, for her contagious enthusiasm and faith in the journal when we were almost “down and out”, and Douw Greeff of Medpharm Publications, and owner of *Geneeskunde*, who took a risk in merging *Geneeskunde* with the journal, and who supported me in all my dreams for the journal. (The journal is in safe hands with Douw and his team!)
- The editorial board for their support and advice over the years
- My family, who had to put up with my withdrawal into my study on Wednesday afternoon and evenings, so that I could work on the journal.

I wish Gboyega Ogunbanjo and Douw Greeff everything of the best for the future. This journal has a long and proud tradition, but requires steady hands, because the waters of scholarly publication and medical politics can get rough at times. *Bon voyage!*

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### References

1. De Villiers PJT. A family medicine renaissance in South Africa. *S Afr Fam Pract*. 1999;20(1):101.