



## To be indexed

South African Family Practice (SAFP) journal has joined the mainstream of reputable international medical publications with its recent selection to be indexed in EMBASE ([www.embase.com](http://www.embase.com)). This may seem like stating the obvious, given the role

that SAFP is playing in the discipline of family medicine, rural health and primary health care in South Africa. SAFP is also on the approved list for the measurement of research output of public higher education institutions in South Africa, which means that the national Department of Education compensates the institution from which research articles in SAFP originate. The latter is an incentive scheme to stimulate research.

Some of the critical success factors for scientific publication are dissemination and accessibility. In the not so distant past medical publications were disseminated only to subscribers and libraries. Some journals were included in a paper index called *Index Medicus* in order to make them accessible to the wider scientific community. Some of the "over 40s" will remember the thick manuals you had to sift through in the local medical library, for articles relevant to your search, only to discover that key journals were not available in your local library, and then the search by fax and post began, first in South Africa, and then the rest of the world. Many months later you had some of your key articles, and then you did not even know about the ones you simply missed, because those journals were not indexed in *Index Medicus*.

Since around 1988 everything changed with the advent of the internet. Paper indexes, like *Index Medicus*, were quickly absorbed into electronic versions accessible through the internet from any desktop computer connected to the internet. The most popular health science database is PubMed ([www.pubmed.gov](http://www.pubmed.gov)), a free service of the U.S. National Library of Medicine that includes over 16 million citations from MEDLINE (which includes *Index Medicus*) and other life science journals for biomedical articles. PubMed also includes links to full text articles and other related resources. EMBASE, published by Elsevier Publishers, is even larger than MEDLINE, and boasts with over 17 million records, with duplicate EMBASE and MEDLINE citations removed, with over 2000 records added daily!

SAFP's inclusion in EMBASE ([www.embase.com](http://www.embase.com)) and by implication in SCOPUS ([www.scopus.com](http://www.scopus.com)) is a very important step for international recognition of its scientific rigour and relevance to the scientific community. Through Scopus, the world's largest abstract and indexing database of scientific and social sciences literature, SAFP will have exposure to 8

million scientific users at more than 500 institutions worldwide. These two databases have a stronger presence of non-US journal titles compared to MEDLINE.

To become indexed in a highly acclaimed database is a long and arduous process. SAFP and one of its predecessors, *Geneeskunde/The Medicine Journal*, have a combined publication record of more than 50 years, yet it did not make it into any major indexing service. Since 1999 a concerted effort was made to include SAFP in the MEDLINE, EMBASE and ISI databases. All follow a rigorous selection process and only about 25% of titles evaluated at any given time will make it into the database. SAFP has improved its MEDLINE scores consistently over the last 6 years and we are hopeful that it will make it into the index next time around (evaluations take place every 2-3 years). SAFP now has a rigorous peer review process for all original and review articles and an acceptance rate of less than 50% for unsolicited manuscripts. It is also a unique journal in the African context and now regularly attracts submissions from the rest of Africa.

SAFP has improved its accessibility consistently over the previous 6 years. Its print circulation is 5500 per month and in December 2005 it had its own free full-text website ([www.safpj.co.za](http://www.safpj.co.za)). The articles are listed on African Journals Online (<http://www.ajol.info>), an INASP ([www.inasp.info](http://www.inasp.info)) initiative, which additionally offers a reprint service to researchers. Commercial interests followed soon. During 2005 SAFP was selected by CABI Publishing (<http://www.cabi-publishing.org>) for inclusion of CAB Abstracts and GLOBAL HEALTH. CAB Abstracts covers the spectrum of applied life sciences, including agriculture, forestry, human nutrition, veterinary medicine and the environment. Recently EMBASE (and SCOPUS) followed. These commercial databases put SAFP in the reach of library searches. MEDLINE, being a free service, is however important, as it is more accessible to searches of the individual researcher and practitioner, searching from their own PC's.

Having said all this, it is important to note that searching of online databases has its limitations. Not all journal titles are indexed (SAFP is a case in point), and even some relevant indexed articles are missed during searches. Some may prefer internet searches using popular search engines such as Google Scholar (<http://scholar.google.com>), and indeed the SAFP articles will appear there, but there is no guarantee of the quality of some of the information from such searches. *Caveat emptor!* 🙄

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