

Spreading the word: challenging physicians to want to be published

John Eyers laments the dominance of Western authors within the reservoir of African medical literature. Can the Open Access movement turn the tide? Read on



It is well known that much of the literature on health in Africa published in Western journals is written by Western authors, and many journal editors – in the West and in Africa – have bemoaned the fact that they do not receive as many submissions from Africa as they would like. Experienced editors know that opinions expressed by authors working at the ‘coal face’ are likely to be more relevant, more iconoclastic, and carry more weight than others who don’t have this experience. African medical journals have struggled in recent years to keep afloat due to lack of funding, insufficient trained editorial support, and an adequate number of submitted manuscripts to ensure regular future issues. A number of organisations have emerged such as FAME (Forum for African Medical Editors) to address this problem, but progress has been slow.¹

Those authors from Africa who do publish are often more likely to submit papers to the well-known Western journals. This is not surprising as these journals are usually indexed in Medline and other commonly searched databases, and so these articles stand a good chance of being read by a wider audience and cited in other articles; which in Western academic circles is seen, controversially, as a measure of quality, so raising the profile of the author in his or her specialty. However, few African journals are indexed in Medline or PubMed, so making it very difficult to find articles in African journals, although African Journals Online (AJOL –<http://www.ajol.info>) now has over 400 multidisciplinary journals listed, all of which are peer-reviewed and African Index Medicus database (<http://indexmedicus.afro.who.int>) provides access to a good representation of Africa’s published medical output, but these two sources are not routinely accessed by most clinical searchers who will rely on PubMed and other familiar Western databases.

So what should an African doctor do to get published and where? Most editors of medical journals are

keen to receive submissions from low- and middle-income countries, and, in the case of open-access journals (which usually charge authors the cost of publication) will waive their charges. If a submitted typescript has something worthwhile to say but perhaps needs rewriting, editors will often assist authors in improving their papers or identify someone to help with this. I do believe that priority should be given to those journals that provide open access to readers in the developing world; after all, to whom is your paper addressed and who will benefit most from reading it? If possible, find an appropriate African journal to submit to, identified from African Index Medicus or African Journals Online. After looking at African journals, look at lists of open access journals. Sources for finding these include: Directory of Open Access Journals (<http://doaj.org>), Open J-Gate from India (<http://www.openj-gate.com>), Free Medical Journals (<http://www.freemedicaljournals.com>), and PubMed Central (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc>). Some journal publishers which publish open access papers include: BiomedCentral (<http://www.biomedcentral.com>), PLoS (<http://www.plos.org/journals/index.php>) and the *BMJ* (<http://bmjopen.bmj.com>). Another useful way of identifying a good home for your paper is to search PubMed (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed>) for papers in your field to find those journals that have papers that are available free full-text; some journals that are usually not open access do sometimes offer papers on open access that relate to health in the developing world – the *Lancet* being a good example. Remember too that, if you have access to Hinari (<http://who.int/hinari/en>) – and most African countries do – you have a huge list of medical journals to look at free of charge, but most are not open-access journals. Finally, when writing your paper, remember to cite, where appropriate, relevant papers from African journals; good papers from Africa deserve wider recognition.

A good example of a journal that offers appropriate and relevant papers on Africa with material written by African clinicians (with online open access) is of course the one you are now reading – *Africa Health!*

So, if you have something to say, start writing!

As a member of HIFA2015 (<http://www.hifa2015.org/>), John Eyers believes one of the biggest challenges for improved health in less-developed countries is ensuring that equal access to appropriate and evidence-based health information is made available to all. John would be delighted to receive comments and suggestions for future articles. Email him on: johnmeyers@hotmail.com.

Reference

1. Gondwe M. Reflections on efforts to improve medical publishing in Africa. *Health Info Libraries J* 2010; 27: 323–6.