

The Ides of March

In March this year, I requested colleagues from various universities with an interest in pre-hospital emergency care to attend an online meeting related to this journal. The subject under discussion at this meeting was the dwindling number of manuscript submissions received over the last 12 months (preceding the meeting) and, with this in mind, viability of the journal. The meeting was well-attended and yielded a productive discussion about challenges facing SAJPEC but also some possible solutions. In Rome, the Ides of March was a deadline for settling debts although I am not suggesting that this was the tone of the meeting or a reason for holding the meeting close to this time!

As expected, much of the discussion centred on the pressure that academic staff at universities (who are the primary source of material published in scholarly journals) experience with regard to producing research output subsidy. As previously discussed in this journal,¹ the South African university research funding model is unique in that it awards subsidy to each qualifying unit of research output. The “qualifying” part is the crux of the problem, with research output subsidy only claimable for peer-reviewed journals on a list of “accredited” titles (this list is controlled by the Department of Higher Education and Training - DoHET). While this might make sense as a form of quality control, it makes establishing a new journal extremely difficult because a new journal is not eligible to apply for inclusion in the list of accredited journals until it has been in publication for a minimum time period of three years.

The pressure to produce revenue for universities, in the form of research output subsidy, leads to an inevitable situation where academics with publishable material will almost always preferentially want to try and get it published in accredited journals. Hence the very limited submissions to

SAJPEC (which is currently not accredited) and the reason for the March meeting. Many of those attending the meeting reported that they did have, and were willing to submit, publishable material however the focus on publishing (for subsidy) elsewhere also has an impact on time and priorities and for this reason they had not prioritised SAJPEC. I am happy to say that since the meeting the journal has received a number of new submissions and I thank those who have taken the request to heart and set aside the time to make this contribution.

In light of the above, you may be wondering what the journal is doing to rectify this situation. December 2022 marked three full years of the publication of SAJPEC and consequently I submitted an application to DoHET on 15 June this year for accreditation. At the time of writing, I have not been informed of an outcome but I am hopeful that it will be successful. For many local journals that have managed to stay viable for the first three years (and in some cases longer), accreditation has marked a significant turning point. In the meantime, regardless of the outcome of this process, please do support SAJPEC now and in the future. It is a critical component in the growth and maturity of pre-hospital emergency care research in South Africa.

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References

1. Stein C. Something new, again [editorial]. South African Journal of Pre-hospital Emergency Care 2020;1:1.