

# Report on Site visit to JAMA

## Chiwoza Bandawe & Thengo Kavinya

Malawi Medical Journal



*The MMJ Editor (Right) and Desk Editor (left) pose with JAMA Editor in Chief Cathy De Angelis (Centre) in her office at JAMA in Chicago, USA*

The Editor and Desk Editor of the Malawi Medical Journal (MMJ) were invited to visit their AJPP partners in Chicago, the Journal of America Medical Association (JAMA). The visit took place between 18th and 24th February 2011.

The objectives of the visit were:

1. To gain insight into the JAMA throughput process: especially the peer review process and witnessing day to day working of the editor and team.
2. Sharing creative ways to make journal management more effective.
3. Additional tips on journal production: upgrade on journal layout.
4. Get some tips on how to use tables, figures, graphics and pictures in the journal
5. Learn publication ethics

JAMA laid out a very interactive program that enabled us to share experiences and learn technical aspects of the running of a journal. These meetings were very important and eye opening in that we shared some of the things that are crucial in production, sensitizing the public and overall journal management. Some of the meetings we had were with:

Annete Flanagan, the Managing Deputy Editor JAMA, who welcomed us. We were located a working office with a desktop computer. We discussed the program and the objectives of the coming few days.

Jenni Reilings took us around the JAMA office. We were able to get a sense of the layout of the office and how the JAMA office operates.

Cathy DeAngelis, the Editor in Chief JAMA and Archives Journals, We held two official meetings with her about the production process of JAMA and challenges faced in publication. We were warmly received and shared some of the challenges we both have as editors were discussed and ideas shared. We also met to discuss some of the ethical considerations to take into account before considering a

paper for publication broaching topics such as conflict of interest and the need for the independence of the reviewing statistician.

Ronna Henry, Alison Burke and Cassio Lynn, responsible for Design and layout of journal. We went through some of text errors that come through as a result of doing a layout straight from a PDF. JAMA presented to us the need to have flexible margins to enable the text to be as clear as possible. By going through a previous copy of the MMJ ideas and suggestions were discussed concerning better ways to present figures and graphics in journal articles. This was very useful and insightful for our Desk Editor. He returned a few days later to spend more time discussing the suggestions and seeing better ways for MMJ to incorporate some of these suggestions into its own production.

Joan Stephenson, responsible for Medical News in JAMA and Medical news blog. We went through how JAMA coordinates with the media to give out information related in its recent issue and had a chance to learn how their blog has had an impact in dissemination of information and how they manage it.

Roxanne Young Medical Humanities. We learned how the JAMA cover has evolved over time and how to generate a cover write up.

Phil Fontanarosa Recruiting manuscripts, authors, peer reviewers. An important meeting on how best Editors can interact with authors, peer reviewers and the best ways to solve some other issues such as conflict of interest with the author. We discussed common challenges editors face in the interactions with the authors.

Jann Ingmire in the News media relations department. A very useful meeting on how journals can associate with other mediums such as Television, radio, or newspapers so that the information included can be simplified and be made available for everybody. This was inspiring and enriching for us as it opened up a floodgate of new ideas and creativity for the MMJ to reach out to the local Malawi media e.g. sending out news releases on newsworthy articles whenever the MMJ is published.

Betsy Solaro Journal marketing. A meeting on other some probable ways which can be used to market MMJ such as inclusion in bookshops, attending book fairs and sometimes free distribution so that it may be considered for subscription.

JAMA Manuscript Meeting. This was a very important meeting in that we had an experience on how our JAMA editorial board do a critique on manuscripts they receive for publication. The MMJ Editor sat in and listened to the discussions and observed the decision making process of the JAMA editorial manuscript meeting.

Jean Rice, and Nicki Augustyn of CHEST. JAMA very kindly arranged for MMJ to meet and discuss with the editors of CHEST, a journal that uses the same Scholar One manuscript central online throughput process as the MMJ. We were able to share some of our long-standing problems with manuscript central and Nicki and Jean were brilliant in providing solutions and suggestions.

Beverly Stewart Manuscript editing. An overview on how manuscripts are proofread.

HIV/AIDS Theme issue and public health papers with Jeanette Smith who had an opportunity to share how JAMA presents HIV/AIDS related issues in its special issue and

how the MMJ can present similar info if it happens to have an issue on HIV/AIDS. We discussed the concept of theme issues and how these can be used to strengthen the journal

Common problems in submitted manuscripts Rob Golub. Shared some common experiences which manuscript editors confront such as ethical or sometimes conflict of interest with authors.

Monica Mungle, and Reuben Rios responsible for Use of social media by journals. This meeting involved a presentation on how JAMA uses the social media such as facebook and tweeter to reach out to people and also how they check statistics using Google analytics. We thought it would be great if we could have an account of MMJ on facebook and from there think of establishing our own blog.

Maggie Winker Web journal publishing. This was a meeting about how we could promote a new issue which has just been uploaded and also was also an eye opener on some additional features and software which can be downloaded to make interaction on a site interesting.

Joe Wislar who evaluates submitted manuscripts that report the results of surveys and journal readership surveys. This meeting was an overview of how manuscripts are evaluated during manuscript meetings and how JAMA conducts its readership surveys. The MMJ plans to conduct the readership surveys in the near future but in the meantime they do their evaluation by Google analytics.

Karen Adams-Taylor, Director, Business Operations, Chris Meyer, Manager, Graphics, Karl Elvin, Manager, Composition and New Media, David Antos, Manager Overview of composition and production concerns and Cover art. Proofreading. An important meeting on journal layout and production. This included use of art on cover, layout of graphics and other illustrations in articles and xml tagging of text for consistency of paragraphs in journals.

Rob Golub Editor training: JAMA medical student internship and Fishbein fellowship. Shared experiences on student internship, how to motivate and assign them required duties. This was useful for the MMJ which has also recently appointed an AJPP funded intern.

Jody Zylke: Letters to the Editor. Went through how the letters to the editor come in and are edited for their inclusion in JAMA. The MMJ has in the past published some letters but in the recent years the submission has went down so it was suggested that it advertises in its forth coming issue on the incorporation of letters. We were inspired to promote letters to the editor.

### **Conclusion**

We were greatly inspired by this trip and returned to Malawi full of new ideas and encouragement from our journal partners at JAMA. It made such an impact on us to see how a professional weekly journal operates. We were warmly received and continuously encouraged. Since our return we have been in dialogue with some of our JAMA colleagues and it is our belief that the trip has helped take the MMJ to its next level.

Finally we would like to express our appreciation and gratitude to all who warmly received us. We were touched that they were able to take time out of their busy schedules to accommodate us. We would like to particularly mention Annette Flanagan who helped arrange the whole trip and program and took us out for lunch. She continues to be a source of support for us. We would also like to express our appreciation to Dr Cathy DeAngelis and her husband Jim Harris who treated us to a dinner at one of the beautiful Chicago restaurants.

For us this trip has been a living example of the effectiveness of the African Journals Partnership Project, to whom we also express our gratitude for providing the funds for this trip.

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