

## Dear Editors... An Open Letter

# CONSIDERATIONS FOR DEVELOPING AND IMPROVING THE SOUTH AFRICAN RADIOGRAPHER JOURNAL: AN OPEN LETTER TO THE EDITORS

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**DEAR EDITORS,**

We are a team of researchers, educators, and professionals with interests in and commitment to medical imaging and radiation sciences (MIRS) practice, education, and research. It is in good faith that we are writing this open letter to the Editors of the South African Radiographer (SAR) Journal to express our concerns about the current state of the journal and some trends observed over the years. Our letter intends to encourage critical reflection and an open conversation about the current state of the journal and its future while proposing some considerations for improving the overall quality of the journal. We are writing this letter as readers, authors, and reviewers as some of us have published in and reviewed for the journal.

The SAR is one of the journals that has existed for a long time (more than 25 years), contributing to the advancement of research in the profession. Over the years, it has grown, with its reach going beyond the borders of South Africa. While acknowledging the strides made thus far, we believe that the SAR has great potential for wider and deeper impact and could become a hub for regional excellence and help advance Sub-Saharan (and the wider Global South) scholarship in MIRS. However, there are a few challenges that we believe need consideration and action to realize this potential.

**1. JOURNAL NAME**

The current SAR name seems to be limiting as it gives the impression that the work published in this journal is focused on South African research and radiographers in particular. However, we have had professionals other than radiographers, and many outside the borders of South Africa showcase their work in the SAR. MIRS is a multi-disciplinary field; therefore, we submit that a name change should be considered for the SAR to reflect this multidisciplinarity and be more inclusive for publishers and readers outside South Africa. Several radiography journals published by societies from specific countries have been named to accommodate research from related disciplines and the globe, which has helped to advance the journals. Some of the examples include the following:

- Journal of Medical Imaging and Radiation Sciences (JMIRS) – is the official bilingual, peer-reviewed journal of the Canadian Association of Medical Radiation Technologists (CAMRT) and international associations across four continents, including the Hong Kong Radiographers Association (HKRA); and Society of Medical Radiographers – Malta; Singapore Society of Radiographers (SSR) and Australian and New Zealand Society of Nuclear Medicine (ANZSNM).<sup>[1]</sup>
- Journal of Medical Radiation Sciences (JMRS) – is the official professional journal of the Australian Society of Medical Imaging and Radiation Therapy (ASMIRT) and the New Zealand Institute of Medical Radiation Technology (NZIMRT).<sup>[2]</sup>

- Radiography – is the official peer-reviewed journal of the Society and College of Radiographers and the European Federation of Radiographer Societies.<sup>[3]</sup>

Other examples include non-radiography journals:

- Insights into Imaging – is the official journal of the European Society of Radiology (ESR).<sup>[4]</sup>
- Health SA Gesondheid – Journal of Interdisciplinary Health Sciences and attracts interest from a wide audience of scientists and health professionals.<sup>[5]</sup>

Commonly, even though the origin of these journals is country-specific and/or professional society based, their naming is inclusive, making them appeal to researchers from around the world. Changing the name of the SAR could therefore assist in advancing its reach and gaining the support of several active researchers worldwide. Several options could be considered for renaming the SAR to follow the international trends highlighted above.

**2. ACCREDITATION**

Despite its long existence, the SAR remains unaccredited by the South African Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). This seems to deter South African researchers affiliated with universities because publications by South African universities' staff need to be in DHET-accredited journals to be awarded the annual subsidy for research publication output. This has led to limited support by many scholars in our profession. Further, lack of accreditation has potential implications beyond the borders of South Africa, as it is difficult for the journal to gain wider recognition and trust when it is not recognized (accredited) in its country of origin.

Over the years, there have been attempts to get the journal accredited; however, these attempts have been unsuccessful. The journal's current trajectory seems to indicate that this will not change unless drastic steps are taken to advance the journal. The current articles published in the journal seem to be more around case studies, and articles of interest (e.g., the June 2022 issue has one original research article) which are mainly written by the same authors who have a long association with the journal and are trying to keep it alive. If the journal was to be accredited, there would be, we believe, a significant increase in the number of submissions from scholars whose research is aligned with the scope of the SAR.

**3. INDEXING**

Indexation of a journal is considered a reflection of its quality and recently authors search for indexed journals to publish their research.<sup>[6]</sup> In many institutions, faculty members must publish in journals indexed in major electronic databases such as PubMed, SCOPUS, and Web of Science. This is because indexed journals are of higher scientific quality than non-indexed journals.<sup>[6]</sup> Currently, the SAR is not indexed in any major Electronic Databases. We believe this is demotivating and deterring scholars from submitting their

work for publication in the SAR. Therefore, we suggest that this journal should work towards being indexed in major electronic databases.

#### **4. TARGET AUDIENCE**

Changing the name of the SAR will make it more appealing to a wider audience of professionals that contribute to the MIRS field, e.g., radiographers, radiation therapists, nuclear medicine technologists, sonographers, medical physicists, radiologists, dosimetrists, radiation scientists, and biomedical engineers. In addition, the audience could be extended to other professions like nurses (who have several collaborations with MIRS professionals), medical and radiation control equipment manufacturers, health care managers, healthcare economists, and policymakers who all shape the MIRS field and work in some way. Wider consideration could include clinical technologists who, in the context of South Africa, belong to the same professional board (in the Health Professions Council) as radiographers.

#### **5. EDITORIAL TEAM**

The SAR editorial team has been stagnant over many years. However, we do acknowledge that recently there have been positive changes. Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly SA, is diverse, and this diversity should be well reflected in the editorial team. Involving and being inclusive of various stakeholders can help strengthen the overall quality of the journal. When one considers other journals in the Medical and Health Sciences professions, some of the common trends for the editorial team that enhance the profile and academic standing of the journal include the following:

- The editorial team is generally made up of individuals with doctoral qualifications and/or professorial positions within their places of employment.
- The editorial team comprises researchers from around the globe who are among the leading researchers in the profession, e.g., the Radiography journal has 40 editors and editorial board members in 15 countries. Another example is the Health SA Gesondheid which has 26 associate section editors (mainly from South Africa, Australia, and the United States and eight international advisory board members (all from different countries).
- The information about each of the editorial team members includes their ORCID ID (e.g., Health SA Gesondheid)<sup>[7]</sup> or the brief research profile of each editorial team member (e.g., Radiography journal).<sup>[8]</sup>

There has been an exponential increase in the number of researchers and people with doctoral qualifications in the profession (MIRS) in South Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa over the last five years. This shift within our profession shows a keen interest in and a passion for research and education. The journal should target these individuals to obtain their expertise to evolve and transform the current state of the editorial team. In addition, these individuals could contribute positively to the SAR in terms of content

and being members of the editorial board. Regarding the target audience, the editorial team could also be expanded to align with the target audience.

#### **6. ARTICLE PROCESSING TIME**

The article processing time for the SAR is long and is a deterrent to potential authors. For example, some journals give reviewers three weeks to review an article; the SAR gives about two months in addition to the initial review by the co-editors. Further, most journals do not go through the process of first having the manuscript reviewed and commented on by the co-editors, but from the onset, the manuscript is given to the reviewers who are considered experts in that topic/research area. Adopting a similar approach will shorten the time of the review process.

#### **7. COLLABORATION WITH TERTIARY EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS**

Universities are known to be the drivers of research. Engaging with universities that offer MIRS education for collaborative relationships is essential to advance the SAR. For example, research has become an important component of four-year degrees in MIRS fields, and this can make it easy for each MIRS academic department to commit to publishing at least one article a year in this journal, given some of the challenges discussed above are attended to. Further, most universities require their post-graduate students to have their full manuscripts accepted for publication to graduate. This can help generate a steady influx of manuscripts for the journal. However, this will require strong collaborative relationships between the journal and the universities, which should be pursued.

#### **8. WEBSITE REVAMP**

The SAR website, in its current form, is quite basic and not too user-friendly. The website could benefit from a revamp to be more appealing to readers and user-friendly, especially for publishers. MIRS education has evolved in recent years to include several advanced assessment methods which equip professionals with technological skills that go beyond the classroom. The current generation of MIRS professionals graduating is often viewed as visual and technology focused individuals. These individuals are the profession's future, and if we want their buy-in, we need to ensure that the website is appealing. Some changes are required to keep the website well aligned with the emerging trends in the profession.

#### **9. ACTIVE MARKETING OF THE JOURNAL**

With the suggested advance of the journal, there will be a need for an initial targeted and well-coordinated marketing of the journal until it gains popularity that will sustain it. The marketing will reach out to scholars in South Africa and beyond to encourage them to publish in the journal. With the consideration of collaborations with universities,

this can be a remarkable platform to promote the journal to newly qualified MIRS professionals. Many international journals are very active on various social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, which would be highly recommended for the SAR.

We have written this letter in good faith, and we hope it will stimulate critical reflection and open conversations whose aim is to advance the SAR and MIRS scholarship. And, we believe that considering the recommendations put forward herein can positively impact both the journal and the profession. We are open to and available for further engagements on these issues.

We believe that in previous years, the Society of Radiographers in South Africa (SORSA) has found it difficult to maintain its memberships. However, with the transformation

and diversification of the journal, it is anticipated that professionals might develop increased interest in the SORSA membership as they will also be able to participate in state-of-the-art research publications that could lead to improved continuous professional development engagement.

### CONTRIBUTORSHIP

S Mdletshe, OS Motshweneng, and M Oliveira conceived and developed the letter. All authors contributed to the review and editing of all drafts, and all authors accepted the final version of the letter.

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

None.

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