

EDITORIAL

MJMS : THE PAST AND FUTURE

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My sincere congratulations to the current Editorial Board members of the Malaysian Journal Medical Sciences (MJMS) for bringing the journal to international recognition and be indexed in prestigious Scopus, Embase, Bioline and other databases.

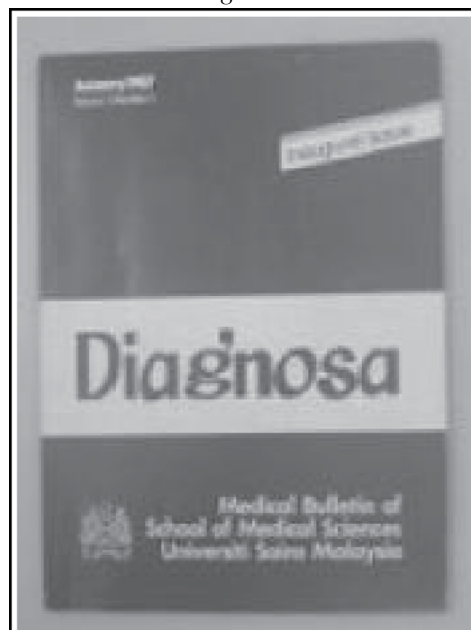
It is indeed satisfying to note that what you have planted some 20 years ago has, in part, come to fruition. MJMS was “born” in 1987 as a humble in-house bulletin publication that we named “Diagnosa” (Picture 1). “Diagnosa”, is of course, is Malay for “diagnosis”- to reflect the inclinations of the Bulletin to clinical subjects at that time.

The main aims of “Diagnosa” then was to provide an avenue for members of the School of

Medical Sciences (PPSP) to publish their work so that the general scientific community and the public may benefit.

The early years were, to be expected, challenging to say the least. I had to literally “force” an expatriate officer, Associate Professor RC Pratap (a neurologist) to be the Chief Editor. We had difficulty in securing sufficient “papers” (any paper) for publication. Instead of original research papers, we had to also include reviews, case reports and even CPC and conference reports to make up the pages. The separation of the two phases of teaching (Phase 1 in Penang and Phase 2 in Kubang Kerian) also imposed a constraint such that papers submitted were mostly from clinicians in Kubang Kerian.

Picture 1 : Inaugural issue of
“Diagnosa” in 1987



Picture 2 : “Diagnosa” was renamed Malaysian Journal of Medical Sciences in 1994



We had wanted to publish “Diagnosa” at least twice a year to make it more current. Unfortunately, this was never realised: in the first three years (1987—1989) only one issue was published each year. In 1990, Professor N Chandrasekharan (Chemical Pathologist) took over as Chief Editor. By this time, the two phases (of teaching) were in Kubang Kerian. We were able to have more papers (we were receiving more contributions from the “preclinical” academic members) and were able to publish twice a year. By this time too, we were referenced: ISSN 0128-1585.

Bulletin “Diagnosa” was “upgraded” to Malaysian Journal of Medical Sciences (MJMS, ISSN 1394-195X) in 1994 (Picture 2). The name change was to reflect the shift in emphasis for contents from mainly clinical (in “Diagnosa”) to the broader sciences related to medicine. Associate Professor Khairul Anuar Abdullah (Microbiologist) took over as Editor-in-Chief then. We were excited that this first journal issue had more pages (more than double that of the Bulletin) and significantly, more original papers (17 compared to 2—4 in the Bulletin). But this euphoria was not to last. The submission (and publication) of original papers dropped (and these papers were submitted by almost the same few researchers!). Fortunately, in 1995 we organised the First National Conference on Medical Sciences (again, to encourage our researchers and others to publicise their research results). We were able to persuade some of the presenters to write full papers of their original research for publication. We

also managed to publish abstracts of their presentations as MJMS supplements. For example, in 1996, we published two supplements (to MJMS Vol 3 No 1 and Vol 3 No 2) for abstracts of the Conference in 1995 and 1996 respectively.

I took over as Editor of MJMS in 1996 and held the post (reluctantly, I must say) until my retirement. We expanded our Editorial Board and invited international experts to be on the Advisory Board. By then, we were receiving more original papers not only from our researchers but also from many others especially from local universities. There were two major factors, I believe, that lead to the increase in submissions by our faculty members. One was the presence of increasing numbers of young faculty members who had completed their studies and were then actively involved in research. The other was the administration’s willingness to recognise publication in MJMS as a basis for academic advancement. In fact, many were promoted (to associate and professorial levels) based on, amongst others, publication in MJMS.

Clearly, MJMS was receiving due recognition as a respectable platform for dissemination of scientific information and was poised for greater achievements. However, there is a lot more work that needs to be done, which I am confident the current Editorial Board will be able to deliver. I am told that some of the papers are now sent for international review by experts in the field of specialisation. This is important to ensure that papers published in MJMS are scientifically accurate and

are of high quality. MJMS now may want to move towards promoting publication of papers based on cutting-edge research especially by local scientists.

In this fast-moving scientific world, a high impact original work may become rapidly outdated when publication is delayed. Researchers may also not want to submit their papers to journals that are slow in accepting and publishing. The waiting time for publication in MJMS is now about 6 months. The Editorial Board may want to shorten the time by making sure that deadlines are strictly adhered to, especially by reviewers. Authors should also be encouraged to resubmit earliest, if a rewrite is necessary, for rapid publication. Publication, of course, must always be regular and on time, not delayed. MJMS may want to consider increasing frequency of publication if there are many credible papers that merit early publication. While we may not want to emulate the weekly *Lancet*, a monthly publication should be aimed for. A web-based (early)

edition for rapid communications may also be considered. To make these a success, MJMS needs to be managed professionally, by a publishing house for example. Alternatively, a full time, dedicated editorial office is mandatory.

I have been closely associated with MJMS from the time that it was first published as “Diagnosa” to the time when I was Editor until my retirement. I am honoured and would like to thank the Editorial Board of MJMS for giving me this opportunity to write its history and see its future. To quote the inaugural issue Editorial “It is hoped that with the contribution of quality articles from our faculty members, this publication will thrive and over the years become a regular feature on the shelves of many medical libraries”. That time has arrived. Congratulations.

Best wishes:

Emeritus Professor Dato’ Mustaffa Embong