

# CSE Helps Manage Partnerships to Enhance African Journals

## Tanya Nading

To help increase the quality and visibility of sub-Saharan African journals, the Council of Science Editors is managing the logistics of a pilot project that pairs those journals with journals in the Northern Hemisphere. The Council's duties include the allocation of funds from a \$169,000 grant issued by three components of the National Institutes of Health (NIH): the National Library of Medicine (NLM), the Fogarty International Center, and the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS).

Discussions on the pilot project began in September 2003 with a planning meeting held in London. Representatives of the partner journals and the Fogarty International Center, NLM, and NIEHS attended. The meeting was hosted by the *BMJ*.

The project pairs editors of African and Northern Hemisphere journals, as follows:

- James Tumwine, editor of *African Health Sciences*, with Gulio Bognolo and Sara Schroter, of the *BMJ*.
- David Ofori-Adjei, editor of the *Ghana Medical Journal*, with Sarah Ramsay and Faith McLellan, of *The Lancet*.
- Adamson Muula, associate editor of *Malawi Medical Journal*, with Annette Flanagan, of the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)*.
- Siaka Sidibe, editor of *Mali Medicale*, with Mary Northridge, of the *American Journal of Public Health*, and Thomas Goehl, of *Environmental Health Perspectives*.

The project's overall goal is to help the African journals reach a level at which they can be accepted for indexing in MEDLINE.

Working together, the partners have developed a list of objectives, which include identifying editorial, equipment,



Siaka Sidibe, of *Mali Medicale*, at *Environmental Health Perspectives*

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facility, and infrastructure needs; providing hardware; training authors and reviewers; establishing business plans for African journals; providing financial support for the project; supporting online publication of African journals; and establishing internships for representatives of African medical journals at the Northern Hemisphere journal offices.

"The pilot project will assist the African journals in improving their quality and content via improved equipment, access to experienced reviewers, mentoring relationships with designated Northern Hemisphere medical journals, and future training and capacity-building workshops to enhance and improve editorial expertise, journal content, and publishing practices", said participant Thomas Goehl, editor-in-chief of *Environmental Health Perspectives*, which is working with *Mali Medicale*. "I hope that the collaboration will result in improved

two-way communication between the Northern and Southern Hemispheres."

Annette Flanagan, managing deputy editor of *JAMA*, said, "We hope to help our partner, *Malawi Medical Journal*, become more visible as the major medical journal for Malawi." She also said that she hopes that the partnership will make *JAMA* a more global journal by broadening its editorial interests and priorities. The partnerships will be a 3-year project, and the endeavor will expand to include journals in other regions of the world.

The project is ending its first year in May 2005. As of early 2005, several tasks had been completed, including completing journal assessments (for example, regarding size of journal and editorial quality) and technical assessments of the journal equipment, software, and training needs for two of the four journals. Siaka Sidibe visited the Washington, DC, offices of *Environmental Health Perspectives*

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and the *American Journal of Public Health* in September 2004, and Adamson Muula visited the Chicago *JAMA* offices in December 2004. When this article went to press, plans for one or more representatives of *African Health Sciences* to visit *BMJ* were under way.

While visiting *JAMA*, Muula met with the editorial and publishing staff and participated in a manuscript-review meeting. Muula wants the *Malawi Medical Journal* to be a high-quality journal that is published regularly. "We have joined the group of the world's prestigious journals", he said. Although his meeting with *JAMA* representatives was productive, Muula said that it was less than ideal in one respect: "Chicago was too cold for me. I like it like Adelaide or Perth, in Australia, boiling hot like hell."

Ofori-Adjei, editor of the *Ghana Medical Journal*, hopes through the program to improve the visibility and use of his journal: "I want to make it relevant to its constituency, using the experience and opportunity to help other African journals."

Providing an attractive local journal for dissemination of research is vitally important to the people of Africa, Goehl said. "These regional journals are the key to getting the latest health-care information to people who need the information most." Goehl said that the benefits of such a partnership include the bonds of friendships and understanding that form between the participants. "These are bonds that can be forged only by direct interactions."

The African journals are in coun-

tries that have NIH-sponsored research and are part of the communication network developed by the NLM for the Multilateral Initiative on Malaria. Some of the African medical journals have had low distribution rates, making research in areas in which malaria is endemic unavailable to local colleagues and the international scientific community. With less than one-third of the 66 medical journals in Africa publishing regularly, the journals have little or no representation in international indexing services.

All four African journal editors have received CSE membership and were invited to participate in the 2005 CSE annual meeting.

TANYA NADING was an intern at Science Editor when she prepared this piece.