

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Challenges and prospects of a new neuroscience journal in Sub-Saharan Africa

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The establishment of a neuroscience oriented journal, such as the Journal of Clinical and Applied Neurosciences (JCAN), in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) has a significant role in the development of neurological services in the region, since neurological disorders (NDs) are important causes of morbidity and mortality.¹ These disorders constitute 6.3% of the global burden of disease and account for 12% of global deaths.¹ Additionally, NDs account for approximately 14% of all disability in the SSA region.²

Neurological services, including neurosurgery, in the SSA region are characterized by limited management resources and improvable outcomes.³⁻⁵ Identifiable contributory factors include dearth of specialists in neurosciences, weak health systems, poor awareness and knowledge of NDs, even among health care providers, strong traditional beliefs and misconceptions about the characteristics of NDs, and the prevailing poor socioeconomic status in the region.¹⁻⁵

A platform such as the JCAN which ensures the dissemination and exchange of information about the epidemiological status of NDs and their contemporary management experiences, both within and beyond the SSA region, would be valuable to improving neurological services in the region.

Currently, there is a limited number of neuroscience based journals or textbooks from the SSA region.² Notable among those available are the recently published Neurology in Africa textbook, and the African Journal of Neurological Sciences.^{2,6} A high cost of production, an inadequate number of practising specialists in the region, poor funding and lack of incentives for neurological research, poor state of technological development that impairs mode of information dissemination, and limited accessibility in both urban and rural settings, are some of the factors that could be readily adduced.

The availability of a plethora of neuroscience based periodicals particularly from the more developed regions of the world does not obviate the deficiency from the SSA region. The accessibility to these available journals is often confronted by copyright issues, cost of procurement and poor internet services among other factors that impede electronic visibility. Even where they are accessible, the contents of such journals inadvertently highlight findings and practices in the developed regions of the world and which might not be feasible or applicable in SSA region. Therefore, the emergence of JCAN is really worthwhile.

It is very important to highlight challenges that could undermine the existence of JCAN in order to be adequately prepared to address them, should the need arise.

First; is the acceptability of the journal in both the regional and global health and related

institutions, and by health care providers and practitioners. The presence of a robust editorial board, coupled with standard journal indexing that is complemented by a fast and efficient peer review process, would promote acceptability.

Secondly, regularity of production could be another daunting task. Availability of relevant research manuscripts for publication, cost and logistics associated with journal production and distribution, are some of the factors that could interfere with regularity of journal production. Promoting regular contributions of research articles from the membership base of Nigerian Society of Neurological Sciences (NSNS), which is the publisher of JCAN, and its related affiliates, accessing available supportive grants as well as financial support from regular subscription of its volumes by members of NSNS and health institutions, would enhance regular production.

Thirdly, accessibility could be hindered by inefficient postal systems and poor internet services. Open-access publications and linkages with web sites such as www.who.int/hinari/en/ and open-resource libraries could increase accessibility.²

Fourthly, the acceptance rate for articles could also pose another challenge. A low rate might inhibit submissions and patronage of the journal while a high rate might encourage redundant publications. Also, the journal's ability to focus on NDs and services in the region while maintaining global relevance could be another challenge. The issue of plagiarism cannot be overemphasized when discussing research publications. Thankfully, the *iThenticate* plagiarism software has helped in reducing its occurrence.

Overall, the presence of a strong and experienced editorial board would help

achieve an impactful balance in the presence of these challenges.

Despite the enumerated possible challenges, the emergence of JCAN is germane to the development of neurological sciences in the SSA region.

In serving as a medium for expanding the frontiers of knowledge in neurosciences in the region, it is anticipated that the JCAN like similar periodicals would: improve on the knowledge of NDs and enhance the acquisition of skills by health care practitioners, facilitate the reduction of the burden of NDs by highlighting various management strategies and their outcomes, shed more light on bridging the gap between the needs in neurological services and the available resources, and inform strategies for control and prevention of NDs in the region.¹⁻⁵

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