**Abraham Haileamlak**

Date of interview: April, 2013

Place: AJPP annual meetings, Ghana

Link to video of interview:  <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VKy89f7I1M4>

Transcribed by Alison Oppenheim

June 2013

Comments from Dr. Haileamlak incorporated June 22, 2013

I am Abraham Haileamlak. I am a pediatric cardiologist from Jimma University. I am the Dean of the College of Public Health and Medical Sciences of Jimma University. And also I am the Editor-in- Chief of the Ethiopian Journal of Health Sciences, which is being published by Jimma University. Additionally I am serving as the coordinating center faculty for MEPI, the Medical Education Partnership Initiative, African side.

I just heard that the Ethiopian Journal of Health Sciences is accepted into appear in Medline, but also it appeared on PubMed as well as AJOL (African Journal On Line) and EBSCO in earlier times. This all were achieved with help from the African Journal Partnership Project, AJPP, with the help of the National Library of Medicine, and also Council of Science Editors, our partnering journal, the Annals of Internal Medicine, from the United States. The Ethiopian Journal of Health Sciences became a member of AJPP in 2008. Since then the Journal was getting various support from AJPP, including hardware, software, training and support to attend conferences. And in many of these meetings, the issue of the visibility of the journal was discussed. And one of the ways to increase visibility was website development, and AJPP helped us to develop our own website designated for the journal in 2009. Since then the Ethiopian Journal of Health Science appears as an open access journal on the website.

And AJPP guided us on how to apply for indexing. And we did apply for AJOL and we did apply for PubMed, and also Medline at the same time. But AJOL and PubMed accepted us, I think it was in 2011, and Medline this year in 2013. And this is a really big success for the Ethiopian Journal of Health Sciences.

The biggest accomplishment for the Ethiopian Journal of Health Sciences is being indexed in PubMed and Medline, because this made us one of the best journals of those medical journals in Ethiopia. So we are the most preferred now-a-days for publication from Ethiopia. And also that visibility has helped us to get more international papers from West Africa, like Nigeria, Ghana, and even North Africa, Morocco and Egypt and other parts of the world, including the United States. Also Germany and from the eastern side, from India, China, we are getting papers from all over the world.

The biggest challenge, when visibility increases, the number of manuscripts being submitted are increasing significantly, every year. You see if I tell you last year we had about 110 manuscripts submitted, in one year we don’t publish more than 30 articles. So we have to screen all and drop the remaining.

This year we have had 170 manuscripts submitted. So the big challenge is peer review. And also the peer review process. The journal is being managed by volunteers. I myself am volunteering for the journal. And the other editors, the editorial board members are also volunteers. So when they are volunteering, they are working extra time. So that is a big challenge, screening all those manuscripts and getting the appropriate peer reviewer for that specific manuscript. Some of the peer reviewers don’t have the skill, the rank, and even if they have the skill they do not return it on time. So that frustrates the journal management as well as the authors. So the big challenge is the peer review process this continues to be challenging. We try our best with the support of AJPP we give trainings to our potential peer reviewers. In 2012 we did about three workshops. In each we had about 20 people. So that was a big success. After that, those volunteer peer reviewers, they acted better and we have a plan to do the same this year too. So that’s good.

With AJPP we developed partnerships, as it was designed from the outset. We, the Ethiopian Journal of Health Science was partnered with the Annals of Internal Medicine, which is a prestigious health study journal and we learned a lot from them. We had the editors well as the other members of the Annals of Internal Medicine, they were quite supportive. Still they are supporting us. Guiding us on how to develop the journal further. Even they supported us in many areas, like books, some guidelines. The link to our website is posted on the Annals of Internal Medicine website, and also the link for Annals of Internal Medicine is posted on our journal website. So the partnership is so strong and doing very fine. And for this 2013 annual AJPP meeting, the editor of the Annals of Internal Medicine, Christine Laine, is coming, so the relationship is so strong it is very helpful. Additionally they helped us to apply to be a member of the ICMJE, the International Committee for Medical Journal Editors. We applied once in 2009. So many journals applied, our journal was amongst four last listed, unfortunately we were not able to be the last to post, so again we applied this year, because there is another two posts for members, ICMJE membership. Hopefully we can fulfill most of the criteria and we expect that we will be a member of that International Committee for Medical Journal Editors. So that is quite helpful.

The other way of partnership through AJPP is south-south where those from the African side, initially there were four journals and later two journals, our journal, the Ethiopian Journal of Health Science, and the Medical Journal of Zambia, joined the AJPP, so those six journals, they work together, whenever there is a conference or a workshop, we invite each other to participate. And also sometimes we use their people as peer reviewers. And also they send us manuscripts for peer review. That way also the partnership, the south-south partnership has also developed through AJPP.

And outside AJPP, since we learned through AJPP, we are also looking for partners from other sides. From Europe, taking this as a role model, we are seeking partnership from Germany and also in Norway, with Oslo University. We are trying our best.

There are other older journals. One of them is the Ethiopian Medical Journal. That is being published by the Ethiopian Medical Association. And another journal, the Ethiopian Journal of Health Development is being published by the Public Health Association. Other journals, most of them are being published by universities. Our journal, the Ethiopian Journal of Health Sciences is the third oldest medical journal in Ethiopia. There are others. Even if I say now it is the third oldest, it is now the top journal because of the AJPP support.

So when it was conceived and delivered in 1990 the institutions which conceived the idea had the objective of having a journal. Those objectives were to help young authors or young researchers to publish their own research output locally to avail the result for the local readers as well as to help those young researchers develop their careers by publishing on the journal. That is how it was conceived, mainly for local consumption. With time, keeping that objective, we developed the idea of being an international journal. And now we are achieving that. So the support of the university is very strong. It is supporting the printing of the journal and also other office furniture, the office, all are being supported by the university. The university considers the journal as one of the promotions for the university, and also one of the retention mechanisms for its faculty. Because when they publish they can promote. So that way the university supports the journal strongly.

By the way, the university supports other journals too, it publishes not only this journal. This journal, the Ethiopian Journal of Health Sciences, is the oldest, but there are three more journals being published by Jimma University. One is in education sciences, another is contemporary law and the third one is in agricultural sciences. So this is supported and the main objective is to support for faculty retention and promotion of the university.

We celebrated, by the way, that one. When I got that letter, I sent that email to the university top management they asked me to call a gathering and celebrate. And we celebrated.

JR: I wish I could have been there.

AH: I wish too. The journal is appearing three times a year. It is not paper flow that limited us not to appear more frequently. Rather it is the review process. So in five years I wish I have got enough peer reviewers who respond on time and so increase the frequency of our appearance of a journal to at least four times a year. It is my plan probably in 2014 the journal will appear four times a year. And to do so we have a plan for restructure the editor groups to different specialists, since the journal is more of a medical journal we have a plan to restructure two or three groups, some to public health, some to clinical medicine, and the third group to be biomedical science. So that way we will restructure and facilitate the peer review process so that since 2014 the Ethiopian Journal of Health Science will appear at least four times a year.

And in the long term, in ten years time, I wish the journal would appear at least every other month. Six times a year. I am sure paper flow will not be the bottleneck, the only bottleneck will be review, peer review process. Even tonight I have got about five submissions. So we can make it, that is my wish.

It seems there are two big challenges. One is journal management. Even if I do not retire, I am tiring because I am stretched. As I have told you, I am the Dean of the college, and I am very stretched with that position. And also I myself do research, so that way I am stretched. That’s why I am restructuring, I have a plan to restructure the editor groups. I will mentor others to succeed me. So that I will simply advise others doing their jobs. That is a sort of succession plan on the journal management end.

Another big challenge could be also financial issue. Until now we have had no problem from the university side to support for print copies and other items. But we don’t know in the future. So we have to be able to generate our own income in many ways. Last year in Seattle, during the African Journal Partnership Project annual meeting, we had a workshop on the development of a business plan. I did participate in that business plan development workshop. Unfortunately the other person who participated, who was supposed to develop that business plan, left the journal. So we have to start again. We have hired another person and I think we need to train that person so that he can help us in developing of a business plan. That way we can somehow share the cost of the journal by generating our own income from advertisements, also from other activities. That is what we are thinking.

I grew in rural Ethiopia. My father is a farmer, priest, and also he was a former fighter with the Italians, against the Italians, during the Italian occupation of Ethiopia. So he is a man of principle. He didn’t go to formal education but he has his own principles. He brought me up following his own principles. His principles are just to respect what you are working on, and to be loyal, and also dedicated and committed to the work that you are doing. That is what he was telling me. So that dedication, commitment, motivation all are built in. So whatever I am given responsibility, it is with that inbuilt motivation, dedication and commitment that I am doing. So when I joined Jimma University, just after a year of working as a faculty, I was assigned to lead the hospital. I became the Director of the hospital. So I managed that and after another year I became the Vice President of the university. So I served for several years as Vice President of the university. And while in the middle of my Vice Presidency, I was additionally asked by the university to be the Editor-in-Chief of the journal. So when the university acknowledged that I can shoulder such responsibility, I have to do. So I took the responsibility of the editorship and so I tried my best not to fail. So the motivation is inbuilt and also once I accepted the responsibility, I do not want to fail, I wanted to continue. That is the way of explaining.

I have to thank the African Journal Partnership Project, the Council of Science Editors, and my partner journal, Annals of Internal Medicine for their guidance and the achievements we have made so far.

I brought two people. One, who is serving as the Editorial Manager. His background is an instructor in the university as an English lecturer, and he is part time he is working on the journal on language. The other person is an IT expert who helped us develop the website of the journal and he is the one who is maintaining the website every year. This year he has a plan to redesign the journal website. So these people are part of the succession plan in the future. Both are faculty of the university. So they are here mainly to participate in the XML conversion workshop, and there after they will participate in the African Journal Partnership Project annual general meeting. The XML conversion nowadays for our journal is being made by SPI Global, and free thanks to mediation by AJPP. So in the future, if SPI global will not support us, the XML conversion that is, what PubMed and Medline look for, the purpose of the workshop, prepared by Dr. David Ofori, is to build the African journals’ capacity to develop XML files. So that is how these two people’s participation in the workshop and in the meeting will have a big impact in our future.