**Chiwoza Bandawe**

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

Transcribed by Alison Oppenheim

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Includes comments from Dr. Bandawe June 18, 2013

My name is Chiwoza Bandawe. I am the editor of the Malawi Medical Journal. I am Associate Professor in the Department of Mental Health at the College of Medicine, University of Malawi.

The AJPP has really been a life line for the Malawi Medical Journal. There is so much that it has given to us as a journal. For instance in terms of operation, the operationalization of the journal, the AJPP has managed to supply funding for us to buy basic equipment. Hardware equipment, updating software, paying for our renewing and revamping of our website. So at that level, in terms of the day to day operations of running the journal, the AJPP has been very, very helpful.

It has also been helpful in terms of providing an intern, or funding for an intern, who is able to come in as a student, usually a fourth year medical student at the University of Malawi, and the intern is able to help with the day to day management of the journal, to help with ensuring that the communication between the authors and the editors, and the editorial board, is happening. Following up with authors, following up on peer reviewers, and just ensuring that the day to day operation of the journal is happening at that level. So it’s been very useful to have an intern. It’s something that is really a win-win situation. The journal wins, the student wins, because they are interested in writing they are learning a lot about how journals operate and that kind of thing. So again that has been very useful and very helpful. So that’s another level.

Also in terms of helping with the desk editor, and that’s been very helpful and useful. We’ve really relied on the desk editor in terms of how the journal operates on a day to day function.

In terms of going beyond the running of the journal, the AJPP has really contributed to writing in terms of providing funding for training. Training in terms of workshops. Workshops for peer reviewers, so we have some peer reviewers and the AJPP was able to provide funding for us to bring them together and to make sure that the peer reviewers were on common ground. We’ve also had writing workshops where people who, like lecturers, research associates, have come for training in terms of writing. They’ve been able to learn what journal editors require. So at least they have that background and they have that information. So that’s been very useful at the training level.

The AJPP has also been very instrumental in terms of the partnership that we have. Now the Malawi Medical Journal is partnered with JAMA, the Journal of the American Medical Association. And that has again been a very important life line in terms of helping us have access to resources. So for instance, through that link with JAMA we have managed to travel over to Chicago and spend some time seeing how a well organized, professional, long standing journal operates. And we have been able to have discussions and input and suggestions about our layout, about our web design, about introducing different sections to our journal. So the week we spent there was very informative and it really inspired and gave us a lot of fresh ideas.

In terms of support again from the AJPP, we have really come up to a very high standard in terms of, for example, Manuscript Central, which is a submission process, and the AJPP pays for that. It pays for the subscription in order for that to happen. We have managed to get on to PubMed, for instance, and by so doing the AJPP has paid for SPI to be able to convert our pdfs into XML into the format that can go into PubMed and all that is catered for and paid for by the AJPP.

So really in saying that it has been a lifeline, that isn’t an exaggeration. The AJPP has been the breath of fresh air that the Malawi Medical Journal really needed and it has managed to get us to an international standard that we are proud of.

I think our adjustment would be to, because we have got so used to doing online submissions, we would explore elsewhere, for example through African Journals on line and that’s what we would have to do. And then it would mean retraining everybody, retraining particularly our editorial board members, our peer reviewers, because they are usually using ScholarOne. So yes, it would require that sort of readjustment or trying to look for other ways because I don’t think we can go back to email submissions or letter submissions, we’ve really moved on from there.

And we would have to look to alternative sources of funding for that. Try and get sponsorship from organizations. First we would start within Malawi and see what sources would be available or would see that as an important investment, or having an interest in that, so we would certainly, we would have to do that, yes.

The greatest accomplishments I would say first of all I think for us to get listed on ISI is a huge accomplishment because that means that you know we are an accredited, we are an accredited journal, and as a result of that even in Malawi, the benefits of that, before when people were applying for promotions and cited a publication in the Malawi Medical Journal, it was ignored, because it was just seen as, well, because there are so many other journals that it is just… but when it became ISI accredited, when we appeared on MedLine, when we became on PubMed as well, so on all those that really greatly lifted the credibility of the journal and the respect the journal was given. And I do remember that at a graduation ceremony where the Vice Chancellor was speaking and the president of the country was present, he mentioned that the Malawi Medical Journal is now an accredited journal and is of international standard. And as a result of that all submissions to the Malawi Medical Journal accounted towards promotion, so I think that’s a great achievement that we’ve done.

And actually for this country because it was the first to be accredited on ISI, even within the Journal Partnership Project, the Malawi Medical Journal was the first. So I think that was a great achievement and I really acknowledge and thank my predecessor, Muza Gondwe, who worked really, really hard to get that to happen. So I really acknowledge her and her contribution. So that’s one very big achievement.

I think another one has been to really have these workshops, these training workshops. We had a writers’ workshop, before I became editor, and what that really did is it brought Tim Albert, who is a well known presenter and consultant, and so it brought people and really helped to inspire the whole culture of academic writing. And it launched really that the Malawi Medical Journal will play a very big role in training and be the leader in helping to promote academic writing in the country. So that people look up to the Malawi Medical Journal for the training. So they know that if the Malawi Medical Journal is going to offer a course on peer review or on writing, it is very well subscribed. I think that’s a very big achievement.

I think another achievement has been to try as much as possible to get the Malawi Medical Journal on to the internet, particularly to have our own website, I think that is a great achievement in terms of raising the visibility of the journal and it can make the journal well known. That’s something that we also count and consider as a great achievement for us, that we are proud of. So those are some of the achievements of the Malawi Medical Journal.

Some of the biggest challenges we have, the first one that stands out is really the challenge of printing, funding for printing, because printing costs are going up and the College of Medicine has been helpful in providing funding for printing of two issues. And then we have special issues that would be funded, if we have a special issue on a particular topic, or a conference, that would be funded. But of late with the challenges, particularly with the economic situation in the country, the commitment of meeting the printing costs, which are continuously increasing, has been rather difficult. So that’s been a challenge, to the extent that during the past year we haven’t gone to print, we have been on line.

Now we would have just said OK let’s just be an online journal, but another challenge in terms of our aims and objectives to make knowledge and research and education known to as many people as possible, we really need a hard copy to go out into the rural areas where the internet is intermittent or not existing at all. So that clinical officers in district hospitals should be able to access the Malawi Medical Journal and use it as a resource. So in terms of that, we haven’t been able to meet that objective of producing enough copies in order to disseminate that knowledge. So that’s been quite a challenge for us at the Malawi Medical Journal.

Some challenges which we have but are managing to work through are the peer reviewers that were delaying, but we are working on getting them timely. We are managing to put pressure on them to deal with that. Those are the main challenges that stand out at the moment.

One thing I’ve learned has been that it depends who is, the person, who is heading the partnership and I think it’s very important for there to be continuous communication and dialogue and interaction, and continuous appreciation and understanding of the partnership and how each is benefitting from the other. So we see the University of Malawi for example, the understanding that the objective of the University of Malawi is to provide excellence in three aspects. There’s teaching, there’s service provision and there is research, and within research, dissemination of research is an integral part of research. There is no research without dissemination. And the vehicle for dissemination, the best vehicle is the Malawi Medical Journal and just to create that awareness and that constant reminder. I think that has helped to bring about the appreciation of the importance of the Malawi Medical Journal and the partnership that we have with the College of Medicine and the university.

In terms of our advertisers, again it is the same thing, in terms of making them appreciate the value of the journal in disseminating information. We are hoping now to have a partnership with the National AIDS Commission of Malawi, just to make them aware of that. So I think that is quite important. With the Medical Council of Malawi in terms of continuous medical education, because the Medical Council of Malawi do give continuous medical education points for published articles. Articles that are successfully accepted and published. And so the importance of how the journal can spearhead and help them meet their objectives. And I think that is the key for the partnership. How can the journal help you meet your objectives, or help you meet what you are about? And so I have found that the need for continuous dialogue, continuous interaction is very, very important. So when somebody new comes into a position with our partner, it’s important to go and meet that person and immediately say who we are and how our journal helps them meet their objectives, to facilitate that. So I think that’s been quite important.

And we are constantly on the lookout for new partners. We are on the lookout, so for example the Society of Medical Doctors in Malawi is a potential new partner, meeting with them, interacting with them and saying how can we as a journal help you meet your objectives? For that is part of what we are thinking. So communication and dialogue has been very, very important in terms of the links between us and our partners.

The greatest opportunity that we have is technology. I think we need to continuously be creative and up to date with the technological advances that are happening, and so for instance, communication by cell phone to say we have a new edition that’s out, communication, and our way of communication is through SMS communication through blogging and tweeting and what’s happening and all those I think would be something that we would want to make sure that we are up to speed, and that we are bringing the new generation on board by making the MMJ sort of friendly to that updated, so they at least can relate and identify with it. So I think that’s where we really need to go and I can see us actively doing that. And I think that’s where the role of constant dialogue with the interns who would be aware of what most of their colleagues are doing, or students where technology is going, would be very, very important and they would be able to guide us with that. So I see us being at the very forefront of that, being very creative with that.

I also see and my view is to make the Malawi Medical Journal the primary resource for all healthcare professionals and practitioners in Malawi, particularly the for doctors and even nurses and other health cadres. I think it would be very important that the Malawi Medical Journal is the leader, so even if others come they could know that the Malawi Medical Journal is the primary resource. So we be as accessible as possible and that as the internet develops and advances in Malawi, which it is doing, that we would be keeping pace with that to make sure that the dissemination happens as much as possible, that people are aware of the Malawi Medical Journal’s role in that. But also I see the Malawi Medical Journal as inspiring people. Very much being the inspiration for writing, and for professional academic excellence in terms of research output and research, and that the Malawi Medical Journal would be the channel they would use as an output of their work. So I am quite optimistic for that.

I think particularly that if we do go the more technical online route then I think that would be the ideal. If we continue to print I can really see that might be a challenge because printing costs will continue to go up. So that is the main challenge that I do see. But I think we are certainly leaning more towards being more up-to-date with the more technological method of output, and I think that is where we would want to go. I think we would want to maintain the standards of excellence, I think that is key. So that we would want to continue to have workshops and to really create a culture of academic writing, of academic research, and particularly academic dissemination of that research, starting with our undergraduate students right through to our professors.

The belief in the importance of research dissemination, and I love research I enjoy research particularly and I think seeing the work that is done, the work that is adding to knowledge, and they are fascinating papers that come through, manuscripts that come through, and it is really interesting knowledge, just how we can expand our knowledge, and particularly knowledge that is relevant to Malawi and Africa, because that is the objective of the Malawi Medical Journal, and I do find that very exciting, looking forward to what is going to come in new today. That I find very exciting and very interesting. So that motivates me, that keeps me going, and just seeing that edition on line, it’s something that is, OK, what is next? And there is so much potential for creativity, so much potential, and these are things that really interest me and excite me. So I really do enjoy research and I do believe in the Malawi Medical Journal and its potential to play an important role in that process.

Dialogue and constant communication is key, with them, and just sharing our experience. I think meeting with them and being open to avail ourselves to assist in many ways. There was a suggestion made yesterday about us being even peer reviewers and that kind of thing. But also if they need an editorial or something that they just want to just bounce off us, being open and accessible to say, yes, bounce that idea off us. This is what we learned, this is what our experience is, and so really utilizing our experience to help them, and keeping the communication channels open I think is very key. So it’s great to have them on board and we really want to be able to help in any way that they feel is needed.

Thengo Kavinya the desk editor. He has been very key and instrumental in terms of helping to get pdfs over to XML conversion, but as he learns XML conversion we really hope that he will be able to deposit directly, to convert and deposit directly to PubMed. That is our goal and our aim. So as soon as we have an edition, we can submit straight away and avoid going through SPI. SPI has been great and helpful and we are really grateful for that, but as we try and expand I think that would be something that we would play a very big role in. He also has been useful in terms of our Facebook page and working towards getting a blog going. So that technological part.

Demster has played a very big role also. He is an IT person so he would be very instrumental in terms of checking on our website, coming up with ideas and suggestions about updating the website, and also any other technological thing that we can do to keep up pace and abreast, things like Tweeting, maybe, exploring the idea of SMSing people when we have got a new edition out, to check this. Our links with the media, things like that. So I can really see them playing a very critical and important role in helping us to keep the MMJ, or move the Malawi Medical Journal to the technological advanced stage that we would like it to be.

I really believe that medical education, but particularly research and dissemination is at a very critical and important time. What I am really grateful for is for the AJPP and their support, it is something that I really want to thank the NIH, the NLM, all of which have played a very important role. I really want to thank them for the, just the contribution. This is like a family of professionals wanting to get the information out there. But also it is not just about us, but it is a huge responsibility really that we have in order to provide an environment, in my case, in Malawi, where we would want the academicians and researchers to have an outlet that is reliable, that is strong, that is professional and that can stand up internationally. And that is the way I believe we will go to. So thank you to everyone.