



Humans – a threat to humanity

To the Editor: At last an editorial¹ on the much-neglected topic of the sustainability limits of our globe. Thank you, Mr Editor, for your most informative, readable, and politically elegant essay. The bottom line is that if we don't do something about the overpopulation of our globe, we will reach the 9 billion mark possibly even before 2050, as predicted in your editorial. The earth is groaning, it is indeed gasping, probably already on a death bed of sorts. Agreed, it is not rocket science to figure out that too many people are being born. Something somehow will have to be done to popularise both male and female voluntary sterilisation once again. Certainly in the rural areas it seems to have been forgotten about. Small families must become the fashion. This is in keeping with World Health Organization recommendations and standards. I know of one heavyweight South African politician who already has 19 children and nevertheless recently got himself tied up in wedlock, for the umpteenth time, no doubt so as to have more babies with the lovely new young bride. So it would appear that (at least some) politicians need to be educated on the sustainability thing. It is also almost unbelievable that any government today can still encourage single-parent families by providing inappropriate social grants for babies born out of wedlock.

The leaders of at least some groups in the religion industry also need to be educated. Surely they cannot forever continue to protect their selfish, in-group taboos on basic contraception? What if we should *all* decide to take that sort of line?

As far as clean water, fresh air, open space, energy resources, food for the masses, etc. are concerned, it is obvious that we are facing an escalating crisis, basically *because too many people are being born*. I can only hope that every editor of every publication will do his or her educational bit, at every 'conceivable occasion'. Many thanks, Mr Editor, for your bit so far.

J du T Zaaijman

Middelburg, E Cape
zaaij@adsactive.com

1. Van Niekerk JP de V. Humans – a threat to humanity (From the Editor). *S Afr Med J* 2008; 98: 163.

Suggestions for SAMJ editorial policies

To the Editor: It's good news that the SAMJ is aligning with contemporary international publication demands.¹ This may also be an opportunity to bring SAMJ editorial policies in line with international peer-reviewed journals to improve the relationship between the journal and its authors, reviewers and readers.

The publication of an article in a peer-reviewed journal involves the editor, reviewers, authors and readers. The editorial board chooses reviewers and makes the final decision to publish or not. It would be courteous to inform reviewers of the final decisions. In case reviewers' assessments conflict, it would be fair to notify them why one opinion overrode the other.

On the author side, manuscripts sent to reviewers should be anonymous to prevent reviewer bias or prejudice. Some journals (e.g. the *International Journal of Gynecology and Obstetrics*, *Journal of Pathology*, *Cancer*, *Human Pathology*) publish their papers with the date that the manuscript was first received, the date the revised manuscript was received, and the date of final acceptance. This may seem trivial but it is not; from the author's point of view, it may support a claim to originality (remember the *Gallo v. Montagnier* dispute about the first description of the HIV virus?). From the referees' point of view, it would motivate them not to delay the review procedure (delays can be avoided by requesting referees to review within a definite timeframe).

Some journals (e.g. *Lancet*, *Journal of Pathology*, *Journal of the American Medical Association*) are very strict in their requirements concerning authorship (i.e. individual contribution of each co-author), and some (e.g. *New England Journal of Medicine*, *BMJ* journals, *Journal of Pathology*) about conflict of interest (financial or personal that may inappropriately bias one's actions) and source of funding. Even the involvement of a medical writer or editor should be acknowledged.

To be invited to review a manuscript is an honour and a burden. There are many ways to entice and reward reviewers; for example, *The Lancet* gives a free six-month subscription to the journal; the *International Journal of Gynecology and Obstetrics* offers a month's free access to *Scopus*; and *Developing World Bioethics* gives a year's free Internet access to the journal.

Lastly: reviewing a paper should qualify as an academic activity (especially for academics) and should be regarded as such by heads of departments and institutions. A nice way to reward reviewers is to publish yearly a list of reviewers (e.g. as done by *Developing World Bioethics*, *Archives of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine*); this could be included in academics' annual reports. CPD points could also be allocated for reviews.

L-J van Bogaert

Postnet Suite 7
Private Bag X8689
Groblersdal 0470
ljfoanbo@lantic.net

1. van Niekerk JP de V. The earth is flat, as are our journals and CPD (From the Editor). *S Afr Med J* 2008; 98(1): 7.