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## What HMPG, your own IBU, means to you

Cellphone SMS addicts who thrive on acronyms will immediately know that HMPG refers to the Health and Medical Publications Group, an independent business unit (IBU) wholly owned by SAMA and hence by you the SAMA member. As the leading medical publisher in South Africa the HMPG aims at 'empowering doctors to bring health to the nation'. It does this by dispensing knowledge via more than a dozen journals and other professional publications. Those who fail to make the connection are reminded that 'Knowledge itself is power' (Francis Bacon, 1561 - 1626).

Repeated surveys have found that the major reason for joining the Medical Association is receipt of its journals. This is not surprising, since most of the HMPG journals' content is written by South African doctors for South African doctors.

The *SAMJ*, South Africa's premier medical journal, is the major vehicle through which South African doctors communicate information and opinions. It is peer reviewed and thus credible, has an editorial advisory committee that includes representatives of every South African medical school as well as the MRC, and is internationally respected. Since appearing on the Internet in 2005 the *SAMJ* has drawn an impressive and increasing number of international readers.

*CME*, as its name suggests, is the premier South African vehicle for continuing medical education. The only local journal of its kind that is entirely locally produced, *CME* provides practical, up-to-date information on areas selected by South African general practitioners.

Other HMPG publications include the *South African Medicines Formulary (SAMF)*. Now available, the new 7th edition is like its predecessors a pocket-sized, up-to-date, non-commercial, authoritative and essential reference to the rational and cost-effective use of medicines. And as always, *SAMF* is sold to SAMA members at a discounted rate.

HMPG publications attract a greater number of clinical, scientific, and medico-political papers and letters than other South African medical journals and have the highest subscription and sales figures of all South African medical publications. This claim is supported by the fact that HMPG journals attract more professional advertising than all other South African medical publications combined, and more than 8 500 doctors regularly participate in their CPD programmes.

It is 122 years since the *SAMJ* first appeared. Volume 1, number 1, appeared on 19 January 1884 and cost readers 1

shilling. Volume 96, number 1, which appeared in January of this year, sells at R58 and a year's subscription is R612. Thus today most members of SAMA receive journals (*SAMJ* and *CME*) with a retail value of over R1 000, an impressive amount considering that SAMA needs as much of our annual subscription as possible to meet the increasing needs of members. Surveys have shown that apart from the publications, members expect SAMA to influence health policy, negotiate fees for members in private practice and conditions of service for those in public service, and provide both ethical and legal advice.

It is clear that the SAMA publications division needed to generate sufficient income to provide members with their publications, and to achieve this at the smallest possible cost. The SAMA Publications Committee, National Council and Board of Directors believed that this would require management of publishing to be disentangled from that of the rest of SAMA. In doing so it was considered vital for authority and responsibility for publishing to reside in an independent organisation. A decision to form an IBU was made at the SAMA National Council meeting in July 2002. This led to the formation of HMPG (Pty) Ltd, an independent company wholly owned by SAMA, which has been functioning for the past 11 months. In turn HMPG has formed a partnership with Media Outsourcing, a subsidiary of the large and well-established publishing company Cape Media. All editorial staff report to the editor, who remains part of the HMPG establishment. Marketing, production, distribution and finances are managed by Media Outsourcing. HMPG has its own Board of Directors appointed by SAMA.

Although the IBU is less than a year old, both savings and income have exceeded expectations. Management is determined that HMPG, your own IBU, will come to mean better publications at lower cost to you, the loyal SAMA member.

### **Ralph Kirsch**

*Chair, HMPG Board of Directors*

