EDITORIAL: CHANGES OVER TIME FOR JOURNALS - ARE WE READY FOR e-MDJ?

For more than three centuries, printed journals are the primary medium of research communication and a means for Continuing Professional Development/Education (CPD/CPE). It has remained unchanged in form and function since the first scholarly journal, the Journal des Scavans was published in 1665. Despite its benefits to the academic and research community, printed journals have been subjected to criticism from many angles such as the peer review process, delays in publication, escalating costs, lack of selectivity, stoppage of subscriptions by libraries and commercial publishers holding copyrights. And needless to say, the MDJ is currently facing some of these problems.

Nowadays, the scholarly, scientific, technical, and medical/dental journal systems are undergoing tremendous change. With steady increases in the price of print subscriptions, the number of subscriptions has declined correspondingly. A clear cut alternative currently available is the publication of electronic journals (e-journals). As has been highlighted by Dr. Lee Soon Boon, the Honorary Financial Secretary of the Malaysian Dental Association in his March 2007 message to the members, the inflating cost of printing and postage to around RM 125,000 in FY 2006 against RM 92,188.00 in FY 2005 should be a point for all of us to ponder. He thinks that electronic publishing should be the way forward as embraced by many leading Associations, citing the Commonwealth Dental Association as being the latest one to do so. From a financial point of view, electronic or digital publication can be produced and circulated relatively inexpensively, and can reach a readership far wider than small-scale print publication. Moreover, it is not subjected to the risk of late or undelivery that often plagued the conventional mailing system.

The electronic journal is a version of the traditional print or paper-based journal which is disseminated electronically in some form or other directly to the end-user. Although e-journals have been in existence since 1976, full fledged e-journals only came into the limelight in the 1990s. Nasir defined e-journal as a regularly issued publication that is available in electronic form, with or without its print equivalent and is accessed online. Any journal produced, published, distributed and received via an electronic medium is also considered an e-journal. In comparison to print journals, e-journals have the following advantages:

a) easily accessible;
b) easy to publish;
c) no physical barriers;
d) time saving;
e) low cost (sometimes free);
f) and authors and readers get closer easily.

With the emergence of the Internet, publishing has become very easy, quick and cheap in a medium that can be accessed easily by everyone from anywhere. With the steady growth of e-journals on the Internet, it was found that creativity and productivity has improved due to network technologies. Scholars have understood the power of electronic journals and seem to have accepted the new medium for communicating research ideas and results among fellow professionals.

There are lots of dental professional journals that are now available online, such as the Brazilian Dental Journal, the British Dental Journal, the European Journal of Dental Education, the New York State Dental Journal, the International Journal of Pediatric etc. Some of the online journals can be browse freely e.g. the Australian Dental Journal, the Journal of The Canadian Dental Association,