**Dr. David Ofori-Adjei**

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Link to video of interview: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WS0cSc_CC8I>

Transcribed by Alison Oppenheim

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Words that I couldn’t hear are replaced by ??

My name is David Ofori-Adjei. I am the Editor in Chief of the Ghana Medical Journal and have been for the last ten years or so, and a member of the African Journals Partnership Project, which I was involved in setting up about ten years ago. I am an internist by training and a clinical pharmacologist in practice, and a professor in the University of Ghana Medical School. I have also been in charge of the country’s primary biomedical research institute, the Noguchi Memorial Institute for Medical Research, for eight years as its director, and I am currently the rector of the Ghana College of Physicians and Surgeons, which is the national college responsible for the training of medical and dental specialists.

Before we became part of AJPP, the Ghana Medical Journal was not that firm on the ground, in the sense that we had problems with manuscript submissions, we had problems with visibility, and we also had problems with appropriate review of manuscripts submitted to the journal. But above all we also had a problem of regular production to meet our set targets. We come out four times a year and sometimes we were not able to meet that target.

The resources made available to the journal through AJPP have primarily allowed us to establish an editorial office, to hire support staff, and also to train authors and reviewers. Consequently in the course of time we have been able to regain our regular publications, our visibility has gone up, we think, because now we have also managed to get into MedLine. Prior to that we were in PubMed Central. So this has increased our visibility and you can determine that from the number of manuscripts we receive per year now.

The other aspect of being part of AJPP has been the opportunity we get in meeting other African editors of medical journals and to share ideas and to learn from each other as we progress our individual journals, and I think that is a very important part of AJPP.

AJPP has also made it possible for us to have access to technologies that normally would have cost us a lot of money to acquire, but which we now get pro bono. And this includes the facility for XML conversion, the online manuscript submission system, and recently opportunities for being hosted in other prominent indexing mechanisms that we think will add to our visibility and project us as a major partner in health publishing in the sub-region.

For the Ghana Medical Journal, I would look as sustainability from at least two aspects. One is the willingness of the publisher, which is the Ghana Medical Association, to continue to support the journal. And there is no indication that the association will withdraw that support, so in terms of hard copy printing and other production aspects, that should not be a problem for the next five to ten years, I hope. The other aspect of sustainability, irrespective of the publisher’s willingness to fund certain aspects, we should also be looking at the journal becoming more and more independent by finding ways of raising financial resources to do its job. And unless we have a business plan built with sustainability as part of the concept, it is going to be very difficult to see how the journal will survive. Not only in terms of printing, but actually in terms of the quality of its content over the coming years.

But I think the emphasis in any sustainability plan we have to place a major emphasis on the people who write to the journal and also as opportunities for raising funds apart from what the association or the publisher will provide. Currently all other sources of funding apart from AJPP support is the advertisements that we have in the journal. But they are not substantial. So we have to start thinking about financial sustainability and also the sustainability of the publishing business itself. And I think it is critical to any future survival, the future of the journal.

One of the ways in which we can get CMEs carried out through the journal is probably to set up an electronic version of, using an electronic version of the journal to put CME elements at the end of each article or at the end of each issue and get people to complete it and be awarded CME points. In Ghana you need to acquire a minimum number of CME credits in order to be recertified to practice medicine. So there is a need for having that kind of business. We could also organize training courses for authors and get CME credits for attending those training courses. Currently the regulatory body for medical practice in Ghana actually recognizes review of scientific articles and publication of a scientific paper as credit material. So if you are a reviewer for the journal, you can actually get credit for each paper that you review, and if your paper gets published in the journal you can get credit for the publishing of that paper.

I think our most successful accomplishment is getting back into MedLine, because the journal was established in 1962 and within two years of its establishment or so we got into Index Medicus, which is the precursor of MedLine. Because from 1975 we were not regular in production, we actually went off this stream, we were taken off MedLine. So we had to attempt to re-enter, and that took a while but in 2011 we were accepted back into MedLine, which was one clear end point of all the development of the journal. But a more important thing is the role the AJPP played in the process of getting back into MedLine through the various activities that we undertook in order to enhance our visibility, improve the quality of submissions to the journal, and providing the resources for us to be able to come out on a regular basis, all contributed to our getting into MedLine. I now consider getting back into MedLine as one of our major achievements in the last ten years.

One of my significant challenges is getting reviewers to do a good job and on time. That has been a great limiting step in our production process. And we are trying to find ways of getting reviewers motivated enough to deliver on schedule. And awarding them CME points is one way of doing it. Publishing their names at the end of the year in the journal is another way of doing it. And writing letters of recognition to them, and also too, if they work in an academic institution to their heads of those institutions telling them about the great job that they are doing for the journal. Because I think it is part of the academic assessment of lecturers to show that they are also reviewing for journals. Everybody puts it in their CV but if you get a letter from the editor saying how wonderful this person is I think it goes a long way in motivating the person to be punctual.

Expanding AJPP is good. I also think that we have to be very careful in selecting partners. I recall that when AJPP was formed in 2003 and there were only four African journals in the group, a lot of displeasure was expressed by other African journals and African editors as to why those four journals were selected. Of course they were not aware of the major criteria that was used in selecting those journals. But it set off this thought that how do we bring those other journals to benefit from whatever we are going to get out of this thing. One of the ways we went about it was to invite them to events organized by AJPP editors. So for example when I organized a workshop in Ghana in 2009, apart from the four AJPP journals, or six at that time, four or six it doesn’t matter, we had a lot of editors of African medical journals attending, and some actually partly sponsored themselves to be part of the workshop. The same thing happened in Uganda, when James organized his workshop, he invited journals in the East African area and also West Africa to participate. So that way AJPP is not so much self centered or inward looking but has always looked out for other journals that require assistance in improving their quality. Also in managing the journal. Because I think most of these journals flounder because they are poorly managed. And there is the need, even for journals in AJPP to have that capability of managing the journal professionally rather than continue in this voluntary mode that the journal has been managed. Practically all the journals are run on a voluntary basis. And that sometimes limits the way things are done and how you can do things and do them better.

One of the major challenges we all have to have in mind is a succession plan. If you look at most of the editors, they are not young, relatively, and we have to start thinking about finding young blood to take over from us. Because otherwise, five, ten years down the line when you are not that active any more if you have the problems that you had at the beginning when you do not have people who are enthusiastic enough to take this, even on a voluntary basis, and continue with the journal. So I think primarily we should always have creating a succession plan. And bring in young blood onto the editorial committee and training them in the editorial process so that it is not sprung on them that one day the editor is no longer around and suddenly you have to find a totally new person to come and do the job. I think that is one of the primary challenges that we have.

And the other side of the question is the opportunities available. And I think the opportunities have to be sought within the journal itself, because persistently looking for opportunities from outside the journal in terms of support for its operations can in itself be a disadvantage because when those support services are withdrawn you are left hanging because you have never made an attempt on your own to establish things.

My vision for the Ghana Medical Journal is for it not to be only a journal but an educational platform on which you can do other things to help to improve the health of the community, rather than a focus for academics to publish their work. That would mean that we have to find other ways of disseminating the scientific information we publish such that the ordinary person will become aware of the changes taking place, re-emphasis on things that we already know but are very important to the public’s health, and that would also automatically involve the involvement of media in doing this, and also in the journal, changing its way of doing business so that it is not only academic centered but is also community oriented so that we can get an interaction from the public as well as from academia. I would like to see the Ghana Medical Journal as such. Not only as a journal, but actually as a service, as a means of getting health information available to everybody.

But the thing is that once you have accepted to do a job and you know what it means, including the fact that it is voluntary, including the fact that it is going to take a lot of your time, you either decide to do it and do it well, or decline the offer. But once you have accepted the offer you must do your best to make sure that you deliver as expected, plus more. So for me a greater part of this whole arrangement is time management. Because in producing a journal you also have to meet your schedules, and it is no excuse to say I had to prepare for a lecture so I couldn’t do it. It means that your family must also accept the fact that you have this task that you must do. I think in that regard I have been lucky because it is not every woman who would like to see her husband turn on the computer before he touches his cup of coffee that she has woken up early in the morning to prepare. And sometimes it is like that. At the breakfast table you get rid of what you have to do for the journal. Then you have time to do your regular work and all the other things. You work on weekends. But the driving force is the fact that I want to see this journal succeed. And I want it to come out regularly, but above all to make sure that the quality is what is expected of a journal like that. So my motivation is, if you have taken the job, do it well or don’t do it at all.

There is the need for governments to recognize the role that journals play, and probably to put a little bit of money behind some of these journals. Particularly in countries where you do not have a proliferation of medical journals, but you have one or two key medical journals. Then it should be seen as part of the public health good for them to be able to put some money into it. Unfortunately because most of these journals are either owned by associations or by academic institutions, the expectation is that they will do that support. But I think we should start making government realize the usefulness of journals in terms of the health of the public.

The other thing that I think is important that we should be looking at from the point of view of making sure that the people, I always say that I prefer the expression ‘the public’s health’ to ‘public health’. I think they are two separate things, and my emphasis would be to ensure that the public’s health is properly maintained. Again I am repeating myself probably but I think the journal has a role to play in that arena.

And finally, finally we should really encourage the younger people to be interested in continuing what has been started. And I think that is very important. We have to find a way of doing this outside of financial motivation or anything like that. So I think it’s important.