

## From the Editor's Desk

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Recently the question was asked, in apparently good faith, as to whether there remained sufficient reason for future continuation of the journal, *The South African Optometrist*. One possible consequence of the current nature of optometry in South Africa, and of perhaps some broader social and economic issues, appears to be that there seems to be some uncertainty as to whether there is a need or resources for a more academic or scholarly journal in optometry in this part of the world. Is the journal simply a luxury that we can ill afford? Part of the problem appears to relate to the type of material that some clinicians or practitioners in optometry might require or prefer as against the kinds of papers that scientific journals will more typically consider as worthy of publication or broader dissemination in their particular medium. Some may feel that a few, or even many, of these papers in more scientifically- or academically-oriented journals in South Africa or elsewhere are not accessible to the average optometric reader but this is often times an exaggeration - or where it is may be true this fact reflects the academic advancements and improving quality of the specific journals concerned. It is a simple fact that the better or higher the quality of a specific journal the more difficult it will typically become for the average reader in that field of study to make much sense of the material involved. Even mathematicians or physicists will struggle to read many of the more sophis-

ticated papers in the most prestigious or scientifically-advanced journals in mathematics or physics, and likewise for other scientific areas of study. This is the nature of progress in science (and most would likely regard optometry as not yet even constituting a science); and, for the Humanities also, many published papers that are considered as truly exceptional will similarly demand a much greater intellectual commitment and dedication from their readers. In universities a related argument slowly churns over as to their (that is, the universities) potential role in terms of providing education as against perhaps offering more purely vocational training. Some, like Vale, argue that humanities are being largely marginalized and de-emphasized in modern universities in South Africa. Vale attributes part of the problem to the perception that the monetary value of several disciplines in the humanities is regarded in a negative fashion and, perhaps in a similar manner *The South African Optometrist* may appear to some to be lacking in terms of its potential or real financial or economic contribution to the profession. But, like disciplines such as History or Philosophy in the Humanities, the journal has other values beyond the more obvious or purely economic or financial considerations that are often debated. The journal reflects the activities and nature of the profession and it is a vital historical record. *The South African Optometrist* has been in existence from



the early 1930's and so it has played an important role in the profession's existence in this country. The journal promotes and facilitates academic and research development and it is of particular significance to younger, and perhaps sometimes less experienced, academics and researchers. The journal also insures that optometric education in universities develops and grows at an adequate pace and this allows for better educated and more proficient graduates to enter the profession and make their specific contributions whether in a more clinical or more academic or research-related environment. The overall role and impact of optometry in the community relates to the quality of the educators and to the quality of the graduates of the existing educational environment. Without a readily accessible and scientific forum in South Africa for publication, the profession of optometry would regress and its general development in our part of the world would largely stagnate. Optometric contribution to the body of scientific knowledge would similarly be reduced or retarded. Our patients, and their vision and eye care, that are probably the major concern of practitioners or clinicians in optometry would similarly be detrimentally affected despite the quite subtle link that exists between such patients and a journal of which they would not

even be consciously aware. Innovation and creativity in optometry would similarly be diminished by the loss of the journal and thus one sincerely hopes that this will not become an actuality for South African Optometry.

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## Reference

P Vale. What has happened to the humanities? *Transactions of the Royal Society of South Africa* 2011 **66**(1) 25-31.

