

## From the Editor's Desk

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A very interesting and thought-provoking article in one of the Sunday newspapers recently examined the methods and drive in South Africa towards increasing the number of papers published by university academics and others in scientific and other journals dealing with areas such as the humanities for example. South Africa has the very difficult and complicated task of growing and significantly expanding its research capacity and thus its ability to hopefully contribute more broadly to global scientific, scholarly and academic communities. Given the various economic and other constraints applying to education at all levels in South Africa this is not the easiest of tasks, but it is vital if we are to address many of the weaknesses and difficulties of the South African and broader African environment. One of the means used by the government, over the last ten to fifteen years, is to provide research subsidies to universities dependent on their publications in national and international journals. The question is whether such subsidies are actually increasing the quality and quantity of research papers or are these subsidies simply being abused or manipulated in terms of greater quantity rather than fostering improvements in the quality of published material. Different institutions allocate research subsidies in different ways and specific limitations regarding the use of such subsidies are generally applied to ensure that the funds are used

sensibly towards promoting research-oriented goals and processes. But this does not mean that potential for misuse of, essentially, fiscal funds is not possible especially where managerial and budgetary controls are not strong enough. One of the potential advantages of such funds is that they can be applied towards assisting and supporting younger and emerging researchers to obtain research-related instrumentation, materials or software. Some of these funds are also used to support the activities of post-graduates working on masters or doctoral degrees and this may, for example, allow younger researchers to attend relevant conferences nationally or internationally and gain experience presenting some of their research findings and networking with others in similar areas of interest. To compete internationally in most fields requires an enormous amount of dedication and focus, a strong and diverse educational background and a supporting and enabling environment. Unfortunately such an environment is not always true of some tertiary institutions where other issues and concerns may enjoy much greater priority. Creative and innovative ideas also probably emerge best where freedom and liberty are strong and where unnecessary distractions on the activities and productivity of academics are avoided or minimized. Unfortunately, this is also not very typical of South African universities or importantly of our greater society and industry where rigidity and manage-



rial overcompensation and control are far too common and invasive. The recent controversy surrounding greater governmental control over the media is a typical example of regulatory over-reaction, and few would sensibly argue that such control was desired for anything other than mainly dubious purposes. But one of the very encouraging and positive aspects of our South African democracy is that thus far these measures have been strongly resisted by almost all except those most likely to gain through media silence and inaction. In optometric education more specifically a similar process of insidious control is expanding with too little freedom and space being allowed for proper development and some might argue that bodies such as the Health Professions Council, for example, probably have far too much influence to the possible general detriment of both professional and educational development and innovation and fostering improvements in performance. Bodies such as this one are also sometimes guilty of inadequately protecting the public in their striving to foster and maintain some governmental policies that are not always that well-advised or properly considered. Thus if we genuinely want more research, and more specifically higher quality research and greater productivity then researchers need the freedom, space and time to get on with their activities with less interfer-

ence from other agencies with very different agendas.

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