


## Editorial



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The year '2020' was an extremely difficult year for almost everyone, and 2021 might be similarly affected. It (2020) was, however, also an interesting and very unusual year in terms of rapid and profound changes induced in almost every area of human endeavour because of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. Research activities were similarly affected by a movement towards greater use of online surveys and other non-contact (or physically remote) methods to collect suitable research data for analysis. Production and publication were also influenced by the whole situation with researchers and postgraduates having to adapt or even sometimes postpone the data collection of their research work because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The global shift, irrespective of age, towards much greater use of mobile devices such as cell phones and tablets and laptop or desktop computers can also be expected to have profoundly negative effects on the already critical global myopia situation and thus methods to prevent myopia development and progression in children will become even more important in the near future. The change to online schooling and learning whilst children and others remain mainly at home is likely to accelerate over the years to come and school, and university education is likely to fundamentally change in a manner that will gradually reduce many of the inequalities in primary, secondary and tertiary education in different parts of the world. Whole new industries have started as a result of the pandemic or will develop over the next few years to facilitate many different online activities such as non-physical shopping and other social and business-related experiences and activities but already it appears that much of this change will bring many important benefits to humankind.

Another serious problem in healthcare over the past year has been the postponement of elective surgeries in many parts of the world, including South Africa, and this has affected even treatments for chronic diseases and, for example, cancer sufferers have sometimes been unable to access suitable treatment with potentially serious consequences. Again, even with these sometimes extremely negative elements, such circumstances have simultaneously forced creative and technological development and some of these changes are likely to have beneficial effects on public healthcare on a worldwide basis.

In eye care fields such as ophthalmology and optometry specifically, the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted clinical education and training to a huge extent. This has perhaps been less profound in terms of theoretical educational activities, where alternate methods involving online teaching can be more easily applied. Again, the challenges of online teaching and specifically assessment of student knowledge has at the same time driven developments via deficiencies in online systems as identified and, for instance, some of the necessary software was very quickly improved to assist in these digital processes. Now, students in some parts of the world are monitored via multiple cameras (even in their home environments) and other digital methods and software that they cannot easily manipulate to prevent potential dishonesty or behaviour that would be regarded as unethical in terms of activities such as online assessments. There is, no doubt, still a long way to go in making sure that such processes work in a truly effective manner and also in a way that does not simultaneously create human rights concerns, and complicating matter is that such methods are not always feasible in less developed parts of the world because of cost implications. However, hopefully such financial factors may well diminish in the future as software and hardware costs are gradually reduced and economic development advances in some of the less developed regions of the world.

On behalf of the journal and its editors and editorial board, I would like to personally thank the various reviewers (of articles) who play an absolutely crucial role each year in making sure that the standard of the journal continues to improve and that journal articles are also fairly and, in general, promptly reviewed. I would also like to thank the authors for their vital contributions to the journal and especially for their patience sometimes during the relatively lengthy process whereby their articles are reviewed, revised where necessary and then published. This process was also more difficult with the COVID-19 pandemic but our publisher, AOSIS, managed to

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cope very admirably with the situation and ensured that, despite the pandemic, 2020 was a particularly good year and a larger number of articles than usual were processed and published in the *African Vision and Eye Health* journal. I would also like to acknowledge Dr Femi Oderinlo (chief-editor) and Prof. Peter-Clarke Farr (managing editor) whose contributions to the journal are greatly appreciated. Finally, I would like to thank the various organisations in the background such as the African Vision Research Institute (AVRI), the Brien Holden Vision Institute, the South African Optometric Association (SAOA) and the

African Ophthalmology Council (AOC) for their support and again there would not be a journal without their assistance and necessary involvement and that especially applies to AVRI. I would also like to personally thank all the people within AOSIS Publishing (Pty) Ltd with whom I, Dr Oderinlo and Professor Clarke-Farr regularly interact for their prompt and always insightful assistance whenever required. Finally, to the readers of the journal and everyone else involved in whatever capacity with the journal, all the very best for the rest of 2020 and hopefully 2021 will bring many good things!