



# From the Assistant Editor



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In this issue, we are delighted to profile Professor Gill Nelson, Editor-in-Chief of *Occupational Health Southern Africa*, who was appointed Assistant Dean of Postgraduate Affairs in the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of the Witwatersrand in April 2025. Professor Mary Ross, a long-time colleague and friend, offers a brief but insightful overview of Professor Nelson's academic journey, achievements, and contributions. On behalf of our contributors, readers, and the OHSa Editorial Board – congratulations, Gill. We wish you every success in this important leadership role.

This issue features three peer-reviewed papers. Mühlbauer and colleagues explore the views of students and academic staff on the physical preparedness and assessment of emergency medical care (EMC) students for the demanding and hazardous environments they face. Rikhotso evaluates the comfort of hearing protection devices used by chemical plant workers who rely on radio communication. Hoopdeo et al. investigate respiratory symptoms and lung function among flour mill workers, noting high dust exposure despite similar symptom rates compared to office workers. Additionally, in an opinion piece, Laurens explores the workplace implications of cannabis legalisation in South Africa and proposes a balanced approach between employers' safety responsibilities and employees' rights to privacy.

In August, I attended the 2025 National Scholarly Editors' Forum (NSEF), an annual meeting convened by the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf) as part of its Scholarly Publishing Programme (SPP). The NSEF is a professional and advisory platform for editors of accredited South African scholarly journals that promotes editorial excellence, ethical publishing practices, and collaboration. This is done through the production of codes of practice to guide scholarly publishing and hosting of webinars and discussion fora for its members.

The meeting included presentations and reflections on activities and achievements of the 2024/2025 reporting period and discussions on a wide range of topical issues. I will highlight some of these here. There are currently 355 South African journals, across all disciplines, accredited by the Department of Higher Education and Training. Using [African Journals Online's](#) estimate that there are 898 African journals currently, this means that an impressive third of the continent's journals are of South African origin. With about two-thirds of South African journals being open access and indexed in international databases such as DOAJ, Scopus, and Web of Science, the global visibility, credibility, and impact of local research is enhanced.

Intentional succession planning for editors to ensure the sustainability of journals is required. At the meeting, recruitment and mentoring of early-career editors was put forward as a strategy to grow the next generation of editors. Succession planning should be a standing item on editorial board agendas.

A major achievement in 2024/2025 was the approval of the [Revised Code of Best Practice in Scholarly Journal Publishing, Editing and Peer Review](#), which encourages academic institutions to formally recognise the critical work of editors and peer reviewers. *Occupational Health Southern Africa* highlighted this development in our December 2024 editorial, and we continue to support its implementation (see page 123). The meeting discussed strategies to increase institutional adoption, such as direct engagement with university leadership. We are hopeful that these efforts will bear fruit.

The revised code documents the vital role of reviewers and editors in maintaining the quality and integrity of scholarly publications. *Occupational Health Southern Africa* continues to invite researchers to volunteer as peer reviewers (see page 123). I encourage you to read the code of practice and, whenever possible, accept invitations to review. Thoughtful, constructive peer review is essential to the advancement of science.

Another notable achievement was the endorsement of the [POPIA Compliance Framework for Research](#). The framework is designed to "demystify POPIA for researchers" by offering practical guidance on conducting ethical, transparent, and accountable research, including responsible data sharing. This is a significant contribution, especially as many researchers continue to grapple with the practical implications of the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA).

The rapid evolution of artificial intelligence (AI) is reshaping the scholarly publishing landscape. In 2024, ASSAf hosted three well-attended webinars on AI, and quarterly virtual *makgotlas* (gatherings) were planned for 2025. Three of these have been held and the final *makgotla*, titled 'New Ways of Doing Things: Embracing Innovation and Change', will take place in the last quarter of the year. Look out for it.

The [ASSAf and SciELO Guidelines for the Use of Artificial Intelligence \(AI\) Tools and Resources in Research Communication](#), endorsed in September 2024, provide guidance on the responsible use of AI for authors, reviewers, and editors, and on how to cite and reference AI-generated content. Authors must declare any use of AI and avoid incorporating misinformation. Reviewers and editors, in turn, are encouraged to remain vigilant in identifying and correcting AI-generated inaccuracies. While AI tools offer opportunities to streamline workflows, such as formatting and editing, care must be taken to preserve scholarly integrity and confidentiality. 