



Editorial

The East and Central African Journal of Surgery: A Narrative of Four Decades at the Forefront of Fostering Surgical Research in Africa

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Abstract

This year, The East and Central African Journal of Surgery (ECAJS) celebrates 29 years as a peer-reviewed international journal and 46 years since its inception as the official proceedings of the Association of Surgeons of East Africa (ASEA). ECAJS, a quarterly, open-access publication of the College of Surgeons of East, Central, and Southern Africa (COSECSA), aims to advance the science of surgery and surgical care while facilitating the exchange of ideas among surgeons and surgical care researchers in COSECSA member countries. The journal is indexed in several databases, including African Journals Online (AJOL), Bioline International, Crossref, ROAD, Global Health, CAB Abstracts, FATCAT, ZDB, Wikidata, SUDOC, and OPENALEX.

History of The East and Central African Journal of Surgery

ECAJS traces its origins back to the 1970s, beginning as the official publications of the ASEA. The first issue was published in 1978, thirty years after ASEA's establishment. In 1995, the journal adopted its current name and began publishing two issues annually as a fully peer-reviewed journal. COSECSA, established in 1999, merged with ASEA in 2007, becoming the administrative body of ECAJS.¹ Over nearly five decades, the journal has been steered by esteemed surgeons serving as Editor-in-Chiefs. The inaugural Editor-in-Chief, Prof. John Jellis, an orthopedic surgeon from Zambia, served from 1978 to 2000. He was succeeded by Prof. Ignatius Kakande, a general surgeon from Uganda, who served for nearly two decades until 2018, when Prof. Abebe Bekele, a General and a Cardiothoracic surgeon, took over.²

Since 1996, ECAJS has published 29 volumes with about 60 issues and approximately 1000 articles. Initially released bi-annually, the journal transitioned to a quarterly publication in 2020. It now receives more than 100 submissions annually from various regions across Africa and beyond. It primarily serves surgeons from the 14 COSECSA member countries. The journal has adopted a diamond open-access publication model to ensure free and increased access to published content. ECAJS has implemented a rigorous peer review system to maintain high-quality research standards. Manuscripts undergo thorough desk review by the managing editor, a deputy editor's assessment, and a minimum of three external peer reviewers' evaluations. Once authors receive and address the comments from peer reviewers, subsequent decisions are made regarding the acceptability of the manuscript. Accepted manuscripts are further scrutinized by copy editors and typesetters before official publication to ensure accuracy.



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Diversity, equity, and inclusion has been the guiding principle in the journal's editorial processes, and they are reflected in a gender-, race-, ethnic- and geographic-sensitive editorial board. The journal's tradition of offering various support to junior and early career researchers has primarily been informed by this principle and has seen a significant increase in surgical research output from Africa, especially from COSECSA member countries. As an example, papers contained in our volume 29 issue 1 of 2024 are from Kenya,³ Tanzania,⁴ Zambia,^{5,6} Nigeria,⁷⁻⁹ and Ethiopia,¹⁰ covering various topics.

Key Challenges and Milestones

Fostering surgical research in Africa comes with numerous challenges. The most substantial has been securing enough resources to fully sustain the diamond open-access publication model without imposing article processing charges on authors, a common practice in many modern journals. This publishing model ensures all ECAJS articles are made freely and permanently accessible online immediately upon publication, removing economic barriers to disseminating and accessing research findings. We appreciate the support received from our partners and friends of the ECAJS and our parent organization, COSECSA, among others.

Another major challenge has been maintaining publication consistency. This was particularly evident during the era of email submissions, which created an extreme workload for both authors and the editorial team. Notable improvements were observed with the installation of an open-source journal submission system, despite occasional website and system downtimes. Our authors have, however, experienced considerable patience and forbearance, especially during the aforementioned seasons. While appreciating the grace extended, we acknowledge the importance of timely communication of important information to the knowledge receptor community. To continue to improve our efficiency, we recently procured a standard web-based submission system, providing authors with a seamless platform to submit articles, obtain correspondence, and track

their manuscript's status in real-time.¹¹ This upgrade includes a revamped website with interactive features to enhance the readership experience.¹²

Several institutions have supported our quest to ensure high publication standards and enhance research quality. For instance, through the Ptolemy project, The Canadian Journal of Surgery supported ECAJS's early milestones by providing electronic publishing through Bioline/CITD Press at the University of Toronto.¹³ We also appreciate indexing databases like AJOL for their efforts in abstracting and indexing African journals, increasing their visibility. Through AJOL, our published articles are assigned a Digital Object Identifier (DOI), providing unique identification and a permanent web address.¹⁴

Our Vision

As we move forward, we aim to remain at the forefront of surgical research in Africa, continuing to provide no-cost publication for authors and researchers. We envision Africa leading in surgical care standards, setting and updating guidelines in surgical practices regionally and globally. We invite authors from all across the continent to submit their work through our revamped manuscript submission system and join hands with ECAJS to realize this vision.

Celebrating 25 years of COSECSA

This year marks the 25th anniversary of COSECSA's establishment and transition from ASEA. Our parent organization, COSECSA, is celebrating a quarter of a century of transformative impact in surgery. We extend a warm welcome to the COSECSA Silver Jubilee Celebrations, at the end of the year in Harare, Zimbabwe, from December 2nd to 6th, 2024. Join us as we reflect on our achievements and shape the future of surgical education and practice.

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