



Behind the scenes

This is the first issue of the *South African Journal of Science* with my name on the masthead as Editor-in-Chief. Though I have been with the Journal for a few weeks, I was involved in almost none of the work that went into producing this issue. In this regard, I want to pay credit to the remarkable work undertaken for the Journal, and for the science community, by my predecessor, Prof. Jane Carruthers, and, indeed by previous editors-in-chief, some of whom have been kind enough to reach out to me and to wish me well in my new role. Given these COVID times, I have never met Jane Carruthers face to face, but she has facilitated an exemplary and very supportive handover, for which I am very grateful indeed. This handover has occurred in the context of an atmosphere of support and encouragement at the Journal and more broadly at ASSAf, with many people behind the scenes working very hard to ensure that the Journal continues as smoothly as possible in our science community.

There is a convention in scientific and other journals which run regular lead articles, for the writers of those leaders to attempt to knit together some, or all, of the content in each issue to create a thread or theme in that issue, even when the issue was not designed to focus on one set of concerns. In what we call the 'front section' of our Journal, in this issue, we have a discussion piece on POPIA (*Protection of Personal Information Act*) – an important concern for all researchers in South Africa and a topic on which we will be running more comment in forthcoming issues, and a piece on Plan S and questions of open science – also very important to the science community. We have two interesting pieces on COVID, another issue which inevitably you will be hearing more about in the Journal, as you have before. One of the pieces deals with artificial intelligence, and the other with pharmacists as vaccinators. We celebrate 200 years of the South African Astronomical Observatory, an ongoing resource to the science community. There are book reviews on diverse topics, and obituaries of people who gave much to the academic and scientific community in our country.

There may be many ways of finding links in the content of these and in the review and research articles in this issue, but a common factor I want to discuss here is that all the contributions to the front section of this issue – those I have mentioned above – were written by people who chose to help our Journal by providing relevant, up-to-date, material for us. In his piece, and in other pieces he has written for this Journal, Keyan Tomaselli notes the ongoing thorny problem of incentivising research outputs in the South African higher education system, and in particular the issue of perverse incentives. The fact that Tomaselli himself, and all our other contributors to the front section of the Journal, choose to write for us pieces which do not 'count' in the current subsidy system – that is, they do not generate financial rewards for universities – tells us a story, and I think it is an important one.

It is almost inevitable that anyone entering a well-functioning operation, like our Journal, will ask themselves what the operation (in this case our Journal) is for. If you look at our 'About the Journal' web page, you will see our formal statement on our mission and vision. Implicit in what is written there is something about the role of the Journal in helping to sustain and develop the scientific community in South Africa and beyond. I believe that this wish to sustain and develop our community may be what motivates people to send us copy which is not obviously rewarded.

Different people who help our Journal have different personal motivations for doing so, but what unites them, I think, is this central commitment.

In an early contribution to the field that is now generally known as 'ethics of care', in 1990, Berenice Fisher and Joan Tronto¹ provided the following definition of care:

On the most general level, we suggest that caring be viewed as a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web.

As someone who does research in the field of care, and who has seen this definition often, I am struck, returning to it in my new role, of how appropriate the definition is for much of the work, in a wide range of fields, which is published in the Journal. Science, appropriately done and regardless of discipline, can and often should be part of the work of care. But one of the ways in which we 'maintain, continue, and repair' the world of science itself is through having journals like ours. And a key feature of research on ethics of care more broadly is its focus on the work, often hidden work, that people do to maintain our world.

Part of the work of care for a Journal like ours is the writing our contributors do for us. We are grateful for the support we receive from authors from a wide range of disciplines. But there is also a lot of hidden work of care. As Editor-in-Chief, I am given space to write leaders like this one, but my work would be impossible without the labour of many people, some of whose names you will find on our website, who keep the journal going – amongst them, the Managing Editor, Dr Linda Fick, and the Online Publishing Systems Administrator, Nadia Grobler, the Associate Editors, the Associate Editor Mentees, our Editorial Advisory Board, and others in ASSAf and beyond. When you read anything in our Journal, between the lines you are reading their care work. We are also wholly dependent on people who review for us. There is generally speaking little or no overt, tangible incentive to be a reviewer, but without peer review, journals like ours would collapse. There are others who support us, often in roles considered menial and not worthy of attention, but without cleaners, administrators and technicians, for example, the science world, and our Journal, would struggle to continue.

In our competitive world, with its emphasis on outputs and prestige, hidden care work is often not thought about. Worse, it may be disparaged and looked down upon, especially when done by women. But we are interconnected and need one another. At the Journal, I have entered a new, exciting and sustaining web of care. Without the ongoing support of our readers, writers, reviewers and others, we could not fulfil our care functions to the science world and the broader community. Care work is important. Thank you for your role in the web of care.

Reference

1. Fisher B, Tronto J. Toward a feminist theory of caring. In: Abel EK, Nelson MK, editors. *Circles of care*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press; 1990. p. 36.

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