

COVID-19 in the *South African Medical Journal*

The novel virus causing COVID-19 disease, SARS-CoV-2, has had a considerable impact on all major aspects of human life. The pandemic has mobilised the global scientific community to respond to these unprecedented medical and non-medical consequences. In view of the implications of coronavirus disease in global societies, professionals and experts have been working around the clock to produce specialised evidence-based knowledge.

Numerous scientific studies have been published examining the knowledge generated globally^[1-3] and as the result of more localised efforts.^[4,5] Such studies have assisted in identifying and evaluating existing research, conducted at the beginning of the pandemic, to guide the development of further advanced studies.

The current scientometric and bibliometric studies focusing on COVID-19 indicate that China, the USA, the UK and Italy are leading research in the biomedical field.^[1,6] However, many other countries and regions are also reporting relevant findings. Several countries on the African continent are conducting studies analysing the indicators of COVID-19 publication output and collaboration,^[5,7,8] and there have been systematic reviews focusing on the mental health of the general adult population in Africa.^[9,10]

Despite clear evidence to the contrary, there are still reports discussing Africa's limited contributions towards expanding scientific knowledge on COVID-19. The northern and southern regions of Africa account for more than 65% of the COVID-19 research generated on the continent. South Africa (SA) is highlighted as the country with the highest number of publications, closely followed by Egypt and Nigeria. SA plays a central role in the African scientific field, in view of its ability to partner with many other African countries to produce intra-regional collaborative research.^[8] Moreover, the majority of the African studies addressing COVID-19 are being published in the *Pan African Medical Journal (PAMJ)* and the *South African Medical Journal (SAMJ)*.^[5]

During the years 2020 and 2021, *SAMJ* published several different types of articles discussing various aspects of COVID-19 and reporting research in fields impacted by it (Table 1). Correspondence (letters to the Editor), editorials and guest editorials, research articles, reviews and articles in the 'In Practice' section were the sections containing most of the material on COVID-19, with some CPD questions being based on these articles.

Looking into the *SAMJ* publications, it must be said that the journal made significant progress in disseminating research on COVID-19,^[11] despite its initial sceptical position^[12] when *SAMJ* mentioned COVID-19 for the first time in the March 2020 issue – the same month that the World Health Organization (WHO) officially declared COVID-19 a global pandemic.

During 2020, *SAMJ* emphasised the following themes related to COVID-19: management and control of the pandemic, focusing on quarantine/isolation/social distance rules and guidelines to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, as well as government efforts and responses; implications of COVID-19 for the healthcare system and hospitals; and its effects on healthcare professionals. Research in healthcare covered the wellbeing of healthcare workers, concerns related to healthcare occupational hazards, shortages of healthcare personnel, and the negative effects of the disease on people with pre-existing health conditions (e.g. diabetes, malaria, tuberculosis and HIV). Other topics included collateral damage caused by the pandemic in terms of its effect on pregnant women and children's learning. Skin reactions due to the use of alcohol-based hand hygiene products was also a theme.

As the pandemic continued in 2021, *SAMJ* diversified the type of published studies, placing increased focus on COVID-19 vaccines and addressing fair and equitable access, efficacy, and the behavioural determinants towards vaccination. The June 2021 issue contained a comprehensive list of articles on various aspects of COVID-19 vaccines. Appropriately, this issue coincided with the initial phases of the vaccination programme at the national level in SA.^[13] During this same time, *SAMJ* published several articles discussing the findings of drug treatments (corticosteroids, ivermectin and chloroquine) used to fight COVID-19.

Furthermore, *SAMJ* prioritised the publication of studies exploring the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in specific medical fields including rheumatology, traumatology, oncology and surgery. The themes of coronavirus transmission and the burnout of front-line healthcare professionals received important attention, as did the ongoing challenges to provide healthcare and hospital management during the pandemic. Still in the medical area, although broader in scope, the publications focused on the medical problems caused by COVID-19 disease, such as pulmonary embolism, and its effect in

Table 1. COVID-19 publications in the *South African Medical Journal*, 2020 - 2021

Type of publication	Year	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
From the Editor/Guest Editorial	2020	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	10
	2021	1	1	1	-	1	-	1	1	1	-	1	-	8
Correspondence	2020	-	-	-	4	7	5	6	8	-	2	4	4	40
	2021	-	1	3	1	-	1	1	3	4	1	2	1	18
Editorial	2020	-	-	-	1	1	5	5	5	1	1	2	2	23
	2021	-	-	-	-	1	3	-	1	-	-	1	-	6
Continuing Medical Education	2020	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	2
	2021	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
In Practice	2020	-	-	-	-	1	10	10	3	4	5	4	4	41
	2021	4	1	1	4	2	5	1	2	3	1	2	-	26
Review	2020	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	1	1	-	1	5
	2021	-	-	1	-	-	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	3
Research	2020	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	5	2	10
	2021	1	3	2	1	1	2	2	3	-	3	3	2	23
Total		6	6	9	12	18	34	28	29	19	15	25	17	218

childhood asthma and obesity. Research on coronavirus disease and pregnant women, as well as HIV and tuberculosis, appeared a few times in the journal.

The predominant types of publications were short articles (letters to the Editor) and reports acknowledging SA healthcare policy, practice and research in the medical field. These studies addressed distinct aspects of COVID-19 using accessible language for professionals, specialists and lay audiences. Editorial articles also played a key role, examining a broad range of topics related to the pandemic. *SAMJ* has been demonstrating its ongoing commitment to advance the knowledge on COVID-19, publishing relevant studies in the categories 'In Practice' and 'Research'. It is important to note that most of the authors of the studies published in the journal are originally from SA and other African countries. We hope that this work gains global visibility, demonstrating the progress made on the African continent in generating vitally important scientific research on COVID-19, and *SAMJ*'s critical position in disseminating this knowledge and the findings of these studies.

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