

The *Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal*, EMHJ, will celebrate 20 years of publication in 2014. It was established to contribute to a key function of the World Health Organization (WHO) to promote and disseminate health research and knowledge by being a forum for the publication of research papers and the presentation of new initiatives in public health with specific reference to the Eastern Mediterranean Region.

EMHJ has evolved considerably since its inception and has gone from 2 issues per year to 12 and very few submissions per year to over 700. A measure of its progress is demonstrated by EMHJ's inclusion in the Thomson Reuters Science Citation Index Expanded as of January 2013, which will lead to the Journal receiving an Impact Factor by 2016.

In spite of the developments made, a persistent issue that has faced EMHJ has been the backlog of accepted papers awaiting publication. Therefore, the Editor-in-Chief decided to publish this online supplement in order to reduce this backlog and thereby shorten the overall lead time from submission to publication for the benefit of both the Journal and our authors.

At the same time, the Editor-in-Chief, with the support of the reformed Editorial Board and International Advisory Panel, has been pursuing other ideas to improve the quality and relevance of the Journal further.

To that end, several measures have been undertaken in the past year.

In order to keep readers informed of current, important public health issues, EMHJ has introduced editorials from public health specialists on priority health areas, including maternal and child mortality, universal health coverage, noncommunicable diseases. Extending the objective to keep our readers up-to-date, in January 2014, regular invited reviews from leading experts will be added to provide more in-depth analysis of priority health areas of regional interest.

In October this year, EMHJ's web-based submission and peer review system was launched. The system provides a secure, user-friendly mechanism for authors to submit and track their manuscripts and reviewers to deliver their review comments on line. This will facilitate and streamline EMHJ's workflow and shorten the time from submission to publication.

Other measures taken to enhance EMHJ's quality and relevance have been to reassert its focus on public health and apply more rigorous criteria for acceptance.

We will continue our efforts to improve EMHJ and deliver a high quality publication providing scientifically rigorous health research and evidence-based health information for our readers both regionally and beyond.