

Spotlight: The Community Eye Health Journal

BY VICTOR H HU, HUGH BASSETT, ELMEN WOLVAARDT

In many low-income settings, where vision loss is greatest, eyecare is hampered by shortages in trained health workers. In sub-Saharan Africa, there are fewer than five ophthalmologists per million population, compared to over 70 per million in high-income countries. Eyecare workers in rural areas are particularly isolated and access to up-to-date information is often difficult. Training or professional development courses are either unavailable or unaffordable, and journal articles are often inaccessible and relevant mainly to high-income settings.

The *Community Eye Health Journal (CEHJ)* was established at the International Centre for Eye Health over 30 years ago. Our aim is to support eyecare providers, managers and policy makers in their efforts to reduce avoidable blindness and improve eye health. For many of our readers, the *CEHJ* is their key source of staying updated and may be their only access to ongoing learning.

The *CEHJ* covers the practical, clinical and public health aspects of eyecare delivery. It also contains actionable, educational information and guidance in an easily accessible format. Our content includes overview articles, practical guidance and real-world case studies presented in a way that is visually appealing and easy to digest for a wide range of readers. And the journal has a particular focus on producing content which is relevant in low and middle-income countries, although content is often applicable more widely.

The journal is fortunate to benefit from a wide network of eye health specialists who volunteer their time and expertise, creating a global team of eyecare leaders and providers who help to create and distribute four issues every year. This network is something we are constantly looking to expand (see below).

The journal has several different editions, including:

- An International edition, which is produced in English, four issues a year
- A French edition, targeted at Francophone African countries, two issues a year
- A South Asia regional edition which has four issues a year in English and Hindi
- A Chinese edition, launched in June 2023.

Our unique approach to writing articles

Each issue of the journal focuses on a particular theme important to eyecare, and we invite a consulting editor and an international team of subject experts to help us plan the articles and suggest suitable authors.

We have a supportive and collaborate approach and invite input from different regions around the world. As well as worldwide experts, we also invite contributions from people working at the coalface of eyecare delivery who may not have extensive publishing experience, with support provided as needed – either by the editorial team, or by pairing up new authors with more experienced ones. Our content is shaped by the needs and priorities of our readers, which they share with us via reader surveys and direct contact, such as email, social media, webinars and reader focus groups.

Our reach

We distribute over 12,000 print copies in English and French to readers in 132 countries (mainly low- and middle-income countries) completely free of charge. The journal has built a wide community of practice with the large majority of paper copies being shared onwards, each read by an average of 10 people as it is passed around clinics and classrooms. These print copies form a critical source of information and education for large numbers of eyecare workers over many years.

Content is also available via our website and app. Journal articles are freely available at www.cehjournal.org and we send email notifications to over 14,000 subscribers when new content is published. Our website received more than 540,000 visits from 260,000 users in 224 countries and territories in the past year. The South Asian edition distributes a limited number of print copies and is steadily building up a solid online subscription base, currently at 5400 subscribers. All our articles are also indexed in PubMed / Medline, with articles freely accessible in PubMed Central. On PubMed our articles had 1.9 million hits in the past year.

Journal impact

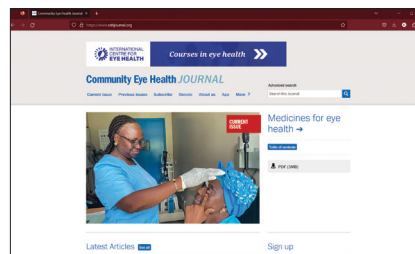
A reader survey in August 2020 showed that 87% of respondents reported making positive changes in several work areas, with wide-ranging impact. These included simple but vital changes such as handwashing between patients, to influencing national decisions around managing eye health services during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the wide range of topics covered, over 90% of readers find more than half of the journal useful for their work. For eye health practitioners who often work alone or in isolated areas, the journal fosters a sense of belonging and shared purpose. As one reader put it: "Without this journal, I am in utter darkness."

Innovations

Reader engagement is a core element of how the journal works and what it produces. We have also recently introduced regular webinars after issues have been produced, with authors giving a short précis of key



Examples of the print edition of the CEHJ.



The CEHJ Website.



(Left) The CEHJ App.

(Right) Available from the apple store or google play by searching 'CEHJ app' or scanning the QR code.



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articles, followed by an opportunity for questions and discussions with readers. Webinars are openly accessible, only requiring simple registration beforehand, and have had great reader engagement with a strong demand for these to continue. We have also introduced reader engagement workshops where readers are given an opportunity for feedback and to give suggestions and guidance on future content.

Over the last year we have been working closely with Professor Ningli Wang at the Beijing Tongren Eye Centre and other key eyecare professionals in China on developing the Chinese Edition of the *CEHJ*. This was launched in June 2023 with content being translated into Chinese and adapted for the local readership. Content will be available electronically, such as through the widely used WeChat and other media. This edition will allow the journal to reach thousands of additional eyecare workers, many of whom work in remote, isolated settings.

We have started early discussions with the eye charity Light for the World on developing a Portuguese edition of the journal for Lusophone Africa and Brazil, and in the future hope to develop Spanish and Arabic editions.

Funding

Medical journals have traditionally been funded through subscription charges, limiting access to those with the means to pay, or with institutional access. Content is now increasingly being made open access and research funding bodies often make this a requirement for future research. However, this results in author publication charges which can be thousands of pounds. Neither of these models are suitable for the *CEHJ*, which aims to reach workers in low-income settings in their day-to-day work. Aiding this, the journal has been fortunate to receive support over the years from leading eyecare organisations. As well as funding, these organisations also help provide valuable guidance and advice through a Strategy Group which oversees the running of the journal.

Procuring ongoing funding has become increasingly challenging in recent years with increased costs and a challenging funding landscape. We are grateful for any suggestions of potential new funders, with business Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives being one potential avenue. We always welcome donations from high-income readers, and these are often essential to facilitating our work.

How to get involved

The first step for anyone interested in contributing to the work of the journal is

to subscribe and start reading content regularly. Readers are invited to webinars and reader engagement workshops which are a good opportunity to get a feel for our target audience. We are always on the lookout for readers with suitable expertise to review articles and also for those who may be able to write high-quality content in line with our mission to reduce avoidable blindness and improve eye health worldwide. We also welcome suggestions for new donors (see above). Get in touch with us if you'd like to join our work or have any suggestions!



Why subscribe to the *CEHJ*?

"Anyone interested in overseas / low-income setting work will find the journal useful to keep updated and educated on global ophthalmology and eyecare. The *CEHJ* has a distinctive approach in providing content in this area and it also keep readers informed of relevant events and training opportunities. The Journal also gives an international, broader perspective on challenges and issues we may regularly face in our day-to-day work in the UK. While content is written primarily for low-income settings, articles will often be informative and educational for all eye care workers. These include many practical, 'how to' articles including examination techniques and procedures, or issues including "When something goes wrong in medical care." The journal has a unique approach in inviting experts to write content which is practical and useful, including reviews and practical guidelines." – **Victor Hu, Clinical Assistant Professor LSHTM & Consultant Ophthalmologist Mid Cheshire Hospitals, UK.**



"As a subscriber to the *CEHJ* for many years, I can say that although the contexts within which we deliver eye care, and the resources available to us to provide services in different settings vary enormously, many of the challenges and their solutions are similar. Reading the *CEHJ* encourages me to reflect on our UK NHS practices and learn lessons from eye care colleagues from around the world." – **John Buchan, Clinical Lead NOD Cataract Audit & Consultant Ophthalmologist Leeds Teaching Hospitals, UK.**

Subscribing to the *CEHJ* couldn't be more straightforward. Either sign up at www.cehjournal.org to get each new issue by email, or you can get content via our *CEHJ* app available via the Apple Store or Google Play.

EXAMPLES OF THE *CEHJ* ARTICLES



Glaucoma mimics article including tips on how to avoid diagnosing glaucoma when there is something else going on.



Research issue with article on how small-scale research can focus on community-specific development needs and provide answers to context-specific challenges through pragmatic enquiry and data synthesis.



High volume cataract surgery in Nepal where an efficient, team-based approach increases output and reduces outlay.



Timely eyecare for children in underserved regions in Bangladesh made possible through community and school-based programmes.



Using technology to help overcome human resource challenges in trachoma grading and case detection for trachomatous trichiasis.



Gonioscopy tips and tricks.



Microbial keratitis case study with a series of a guided questions.

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