EDITORIAL

Studying health solutions for the poor is not enough

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In 1987, the Commission on Health Research for Development noted that new knowledge (research) was needed to create effective action to improve the health of poor people and that it (this type of research) had been enormously neglected.¹ They went on to indicate that all public health services need to embed in their plans the resources needed to carry it out. This needed to be applied across the board, and not only in low-income countries. Little has changed since 1987.

In this issue of the *Journal*, we report a point of view that builds on this need, indicating that it is not sufficient just to carry out the research but that it needs to lead to action for change and this change must be documented.² Moreover, the authors indicate that the process requires a formal mechanism in order for it to be monitored. Only in this way can we confirm that it leads to the desperately needed action for health. They propose a radical approach to this problem, namely that scientific journals (starting with *Public Health Action* [PHA]) undertake responsibility for monitoring.

We fully concur with the authors that a mechanism is essential to ensure that what we say we do, we actually do. Moreover, such a mechanism would provide 'value added' to the research we carry out. In public health, it is important not only to identify the 'what' but also the 'who', 'when' and 'where'. The real question is, how should this be done?

If this were a task that the *Journal* were to carry out, it would need to be supported with the resources to do so. This implies several things. First, those who would carry out the task must be qualified for it if it is to have any credibility. This would imply that the *Journal* would need to engage (a) specialist(s) to undertake the task. Would this be ad hoc or full-time? What would the qualifications need to be? Second, as PHA operates on the revenues obtained from the authors who publish in the *Journal*, would we then add a surcharge to cover the costs? Obviously this would normally be a charge passed on to those who originally funded the research in most instances, but it would further distance the *Journal* from being able to publish original research that does not have a sponsor.

We fully endorse the need for a mechanism for monitoring the actions emanating from the results of research in order to validate the benefit of this research. However, it is not clear who should do this. This is not a question that should be left dangling; it needs urgently to be addressed by an expert forum to find a way forward.

References

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- 2 Harries A D, Zacharia R, Ramsay A, et al. Does research make a difference to public health? Time for scientific journals to cross the Rubicon. *Public Health Action* 2014; 4: 1.

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