

## MMJ: new instructions to authors

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Readers and contributors to the Malta Medical Journal will be aware that the MMJ has had significant administrative problems relating to the final processing of manuscripts prior to their publication on-line.<sup>1</sup> As a result, and in tandem with ever-increasing manuscript submissions, the MMJ has accrued a large backlog of completed papers awaiting publication that, in some instances, has exceeded eighteen months. Following discussions with personnel from Administration within the Faculty of Medicine and senior members within the Marketing, Communications and Alumni Office at the University of Malta measures have now been taken to address this crisis. Whilst we welcome the new help and thank those who have made this possible, we have started to work on the backlog and hope that time intervals from submission-to-publication will start to reduce. Indeed the last three issues have been finalised and turned around in a relatively short period of just a few months.

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### COVER PICTURE

**'Bagheera dreams'** - *Oil on canvas board with painting knife*

Victor Grech is a consultant paediatrician with a special interest in paediatric cardiology. He finds photography and painting relaxing pastimes. He lives in Pembroke with his family, as well as three Siamese cats with the Kiplingesque names Shanti, Mowgli and Shere Khan. This painting depicts these felines' predecessor, beloved Bagheera who crossed the Rainbow Bridge - missed but not forgotten (1994-2011).

The MMJ Executive Board has also reviewed the Journal's acceptance policy. Most importantly, the MMJ will continue to accept manuscripts based on original research, but case reports will only be considered if exceptional and strongly associated with Malta or relevant to Maltese Healthcare. Reviews and updates will only be accepted by 'invitation' from the Editor. These increasingly stringent criteria for acceptance are designed to restrict papers that are of less interest to the readership, concentrate peer-review time, reduce turnaround times and improve the overall standard of the MMJ

Concomitantly the MMJ Executive Board has made changes to the 'Instructions to Authors' (ITA). Many sub-sections have been clarified and, most importantly, a detailed section on Ethical approval in relation to scientific submissions and publications has been included. In this regard, the MMJ board is grateful to Dr Ian Baldacchino for his input and

advice.<sup>2-6</sup> **All authors are strongly encouraged to read 'The Instructions to Authors' in full and comply with all requirements before submitting a manuscript.** In future, the MMJ will adopt a return-to-sender policy for those manuscripts not compliant with ITA, and this will simply delay the whole process for individual papers, primarily at the expense of the authors whilst not taking up any more of the MMJ administrative time. In practice, this commonly applies to references cited in an incorrect format: authors will no longer be asked to correct these at a final, pre-publication stage but will receive their manuscript for correction before the peer review process even commences.

The MMJ is experiencing a considerable amount of work-in-progress, and significant strides have been undertaken to reduce the backlog of completed papers 'pending' publication. Nevertheless the latter is considerable and we would ask our readers for patience whilst the MMJ 'catches up'!

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## REFERENCES

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3. The Helsinki Declaration as amended by the 64th WMA General Assembly Fortaleza Brazil October 2013.
4. The Data Protection Act Chapter 586, of the Laws of Malta.
5. Directive 2010/63/EU on the protection of animals used in studies. <https://legislation.mt/eli/sl/439.20/eng/pdf>
6. ICJME Conflict of interest (COI) Disclosure Form. <https://www.icmje.org/disclosure-of-interest/>