



When editors publish in their own journals

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From time to time we publish articles in *CMAJ* that have been written by members of our senior editorial staff. An example appears on page 1409 in this issue. Since 1997, 25 papers by senior editors have been published in the journal, and this rightly raises questions about fairness to other authors and about conflict of interest.

In fact, contributions by editors fall into 2 general categories: editorials on the one hand, and research papers and reviews on the other. Writing editorials is clearly part of the job of being an editor. Editorials by our senior staff are not formally peer reviewed, although they are often circulated to a variety of experts for comment and criticism before publication. Since 1997 we have published 15 editorials by senior staff, not including articles signed by the editor-in-chief alone.¹⁻¹⁵

The more important questions, however, surround the publication in *CMAJ* of original research or review articles by our own editors. Since 1997 we have published 10 such

papers by our senior editors.¹⁶⁻²⁵ Although we encourage our editors to publish in other journals (and they frequently do²⁶⁻³⁸), we consider that there are 2 reasons for allowing our editorial staff to publish in *CMAJ*. First, some original research done by our editors is of interest mainly to health care professionals in Canada and is relevant to the development of Canadian health policy. The research letter published in the current issue is an example. It is unlikely that this research would find a home in a general medical journal elsewhere.

Secondly, almost all the senior editors of the journal are university faculty members. As such, they participate in research with colleagues, residents and students, with whom they coauthor reports on their findings. A policy that denied publication in *CMAJ* to our editors would unfairly limit the avenues of publication available to their colleagues. Nor would it be proper for editors to decline authorship of research in which they have made a substantial



contribution; the guidelines for the submission of manuscripts developed by the Vancouver Group specify that all researchers who meet the criteria for authorship in a paper must be credited.

When reviewing a manuscript submitted by one of our editors we deliberately exclude the editor in question from all aspects of the review process. The editor-author is not aware of the choice of peer reviewers and is not present when his or her manuscript is discussed at our weekly editorial meeting. Indeed, editors absent themselves from discussions of any paper that may present an intellectual conflict of interest. Although a practice of blinding editors and reviewers to the authorship of submissions might appear to offer a greater assurance of impartiality, in practice this is neither feasible nor effective with respect to either staff-written papers or, indeed, submissions from outside. We believe that our policy is fair to other authors competing for journal space and to our editors and their colleagues. In the end, and as at any other scientific medical journal, we must rely on our own intellectual integrity to maintain standards for review that are reasonable and fair.

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