

I was surprised by the bias presented in the 2 recently published *CMAJ* articles on the conflict in Gaza and by their tendency to present unattributed and unsupported allegations as fact.<sup>1,2</sup> Publishing articles like this without providing context leaves an unsophisticated reader to think that the Israeli military operation was a one-sided attack by a powerful force against a poor and innocent citizenry. Hamas' provocation was prolonged and relentless before Israel's powerful response, which should also be understood as part of the wider conflict against Islamist terror.

Information should have been provided on the potential conflicts of interest of the authors, peer review should have been conducted and some sort of editorial contextualization should have been offered; these steps are standard for scientific articles published in the Journal. I am tempted to suggest that these 2 articles should not have been published at all because *CMAJ* is an unlikely forum for such material, but I should not insist on censoring a legitimate point of view. However, facts must be correct and the context must be presented fairly. In presenting such a limited snapshot of the terrible grief in Gaza, I believe that *CMAJ* failed in these areas and may have led astray readers without background regarding the conflict and its antecedents.

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**Competing interests:** None declared.

#### REFERENCES

1. Mason C. Gaza's health care system crippled before — and after. *CMAJ* 2009;180:608-9.
2. Dumont F. Dispatch from the medical front: on the ground in the Gaza Strip. *CMAJ* 2009;180:610.

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I commend *CMAJ* for reporting on the humanitarian disaster in Gaza, which has fallen off the front pages of most of the newspapers in the Western world. I have been astounded by the response to Christopher Mason's article,<sup>1</sup> as evidenced

by the eletters submitted to cmaj.ca. Despite the fact that Mason cited many independent and impartial sources in his article, some members of the medical community here in Canada have had the audacity to brush aside the raw data to turn the publication of his article and another one on Gaza in the same issue of *CMAJ*<sup>2</sup> into a political debate.

As physicians, we are obliged to treat those in need regardless of political affiliation or religious beliefs. The people of Gaza are suffering beyond belief from this humanitarian disaster, and it is our duty as current or future physicians to advocate for their right to adequate health care.

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**Competing interests:** None declared.

#### REFERENCES

1. Mason C. Gaza's health care system crippled before — and after. *CMAJ* 2009;180:608-9.
2. Dumont F. Dispatch from the medical front: on the ground in the Gaza Strip. *CMAJ* 2009;180:610.

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As a long-standing *CMAJ* reader and sometime contributor I was appalled at the highly skewed report on Gaza by François Dumont.<sup>1</sup> Publication of such a piece seems to be way beyond the mandate of the Journal.

Israel is portrayed as an aggressor against the Gazan population for no reason, as the author fails to highlight the factors that precipitated the military action. Dumont quotes comparative death figures as if the fact that fewer Israelis died diminishes the terror felt by the Israeli population and the traumatic impact of daily exposure to potentially lethal rocket attacks. Good shelters, advanced warning systems and a state of constant tense alertness are the reasons why so few deaths have occurred in Israel.

The terrible, inhuman acts of the Gazan government against its own population are not noted in the article. No mention is made of the fact that aid materials were stolen by Hamas militiamen, that Gazan hospi-

tals were used to hide gunmen or that medical aid offered by Israel was virtually prohibited by the Hamas regime even to the detriment of its own civilian population. Hamas gunman murdered patients in Gaza's hospitals if they believed them to be collaborators, without anything resembling a trial. I am disappointed that *CMAJ* has chosen to use its pages to publish what in essence is a political piece that demonizes Israel's need to defend its citizens and suggests that Hamas had nothing to do with the state of the population for which it is responsible.

#### Michael Gordon MD MSc

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**Competing interests:** None declared.

#### REFERENCE

1. Dumont F. Dispatch from the medical front: on the ground in the Gaza Strip. *CMAJ* 2009;180:610.

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I write to express my concern about 2 articles on health care in the Gaza Strip recently published in *CMAJ*. Christopher Mason's report<sup>1</sup> describing the state of Gaza's health system before and after Israel's Operation Cast Lead — an Israeli military operation prompted by years of Palestinian rocket and mortar attacks on Israeli civilians — is misleading and incomplete. Similarly, the article by François Dumont<sup>2</sup> of Médecins Sans Frontières appears to blame Israel alone for the deficiencies of the health system in Gaza.

Elements were omitted from the articles that would have led readers to form different conclusions from those implied by the articles' authors. I will mention only a few. Israel's campaign in Gaza was a defensive response to many years of rocket bombardment of Israeli towns, supported by the Hamas administration of the territory: it was not an unprovoked invasion. Moreover, there was no mention of Hamas' responsibility for the health and welfare of the Palestinian people in Gaza; in fact, Hamas redirected humanitarian aid that was meant for ordinary citi-

zens and made hospitals and ambulances into targets by hiding gunmen within hospitals and terrorists within ambulances. There are also many examples of Israel's efforts to treat Palestinians in Israeli hospitals and to facilitate aid to Gaza.

Although I appreciate that *CMAJ* publishes articles on global health issues, it is important to me, as a reader and former editorial board member, that the Journal does not present inaccurate, biased or one-sided views that will mislead readers. I object to the use of the pages of *CMAJ* to promulgate political opinion rather than to provide balanced information and education for the readership.

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**Competing interests:** None declared.

**REFERENCES**

1. Mason C. Gaza's health care system crippled before — and after. *CMAJ* 2009;180:608-9.
2. Dumont F. Dispatch from the medical front: on the ground in the Gaza Strip. *CMAJ* 2009;180:610.

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**The editors respond:**

The preceding letters are representative of the approximately 275 letters that *CMAJ* received following the publication of a recent News article<sup>1</sup> and Dispatch from the Medical Front.<sup>2</sup>

As with previous articles that *CMAJ* has published about health issues in war zones,<sup>3</sup> neither article forayed into geopolitical debate about the root causes of the conflict. In keeping with this policy, the News article primarily quoted sources from international aid organizations, while the Dispatch was a first-hand, front-line account by a staff member of Médecins Sans Frontières, which was providing humanitarian aid and medical treatment in Gaza. In retrospect, publishing 2 articles on this subject in 1 issue, albeit normal in

news organizations, may have made it appear that *CMAJ* was taking an editorial position on the Arab–Israeli conflict. This is certainly not the case.

We have now received, and will soon publish, several Dispatch articles with interesting perspectives on the health-related consequences of the Middle East conflict in Israel.

**Wayne Kondro MA**

News Editor

**Barbara Sibbald BJ**

Deputy Editor, News and Humanities

**Paul C. Hébert MD MHSc**

Editor-in-Chief, *CMAJ*

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1. Mason C. Gaza's health care system crippled before — and after. *CMAJ* 2009;180:608-9.
2. Dumont F. Dispatch from the medical front: on the ground in the Gaza Strip. *CMAJ* 2009;180:610.
3. Mason C. Emergency medical response strategy

proved critical to sustaining Georgia's health infrastructure. *CMAJ* 2009;179:762-3.

DOI:10.1503/cmaj.090768

**Correction**

In a recent article on the efficacy of pneumococcal vaccination in adults,<sup>1</sup> the second sentence of the Contributors statement at the end of the article should have read “Anke Huss and Pippa Scott contributed equally to the paper, completed the literature search, extracted the data and performed the data analysis.”

**REFERENCE**

1. Huss A, Scott P, Stuck AE, et al. Efficacy of pneumococcal vaccination in adults: a meta-analysis. *CMAJ* 2009;180:48-58.

DOI:10.1503/cmaj.090733



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