

need for the CMA and *CMAJ* to take a leadership role, this is a deeply unfortunate own goal.

**Ordan J. Lehmann MD**

University of Alberta, Calgary, Alta.

## Reference

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*CMAJ* 2016. DOI:10.1503/cmaj.1150094

We write as concerned members of the CMA and as refugee health advocates in response to the recent dismissal of Dr. John Fletcher, editor-in-chief of *CMAJ*, as well as the Journal Oversight Committee.<sup>1</sup> We realize that there are many issues that are likely at play here, and we clearly do not know or understand the complexity of the relationship between the CMA and *CMAJ*.

We have been impressed with both *CMAJ* and the CMA, because they have done their part in advocating in a respectful and professional manner for the rights of refugees in this country. The editorial by Stanbrook in 2014 was a brilliant piece that provided a crystal clear understanding to many members who perhaps did not fully comprehend the issues.<sup>2</sup> *CMAJ* has used its news section to clarify important issues, such as the cuts to refugee health. We hope that the independence of the journal can be maintained to ensure transparency and integrity.

Refugee doctors in Canada were honoured to stand beside Dr. Chris Simpson who, as then president of the CMA, spoke at the news conference on Parliament Hill in 2015 in support of the need to rescind the cuts to the interim federal health program;<sup>3</sup> this has now come to fruition. In January 2016, the current president of the CMA, Dr. Cindy Forbes, joined us in Ottawa for a workshop on refugee health and spoke beautifully of the need for physicians to step up in the effort to provide care to the influx of Syrian refugees coming to Canada. She emphasized CMA's role in providing the needed resources and information for providers to do this job effectively.

We feel strongly that the CMA and *CMAJ* can and should come to terms

with how to maintain the news section and the independent nature of the journal.

**Doug Gruner MD**

Department of Family Medicine,  
University of Ottawa, Bruyère Family  
Health Team, Ottawa, Ont.

**Meb Rashid MD**

Crossroads Clinic, Women's College  
Hospital, Toronto, Ont.

**Philip Berger MD**

Inner City Health Program, St. Michael's  
Hospital, Toronto, Ont.

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3. Rich P. Reinstate care for refugees, feds told. Available: <https://www.cma.ca/En/Pages/reinstate-care-for-refugees-feds-told.aspx> (accessed 2016. Mar. 9).

*CMAJ* 2016. DOI:10.1503/cmaj.1150095

As a Canadian physician, I am increasingly embarrassed. Undoubtedly, the firing of *CMAJ*'s editor-in-chief and disbandment of the Journal Oversight Committee<sup>1</sup> is about money, not a falling reputation.<sup>2</sup>

*CMAJ* is a source of pride and has been ever since John Hoey's stewardship. In spite of what the CMA president or its executive may think, the journal has a sterling international reputation. To be guided by impact factors, (whatever they may be) is simply evidence of the CMA's insufficient knowledge of the complex world of medical publishing. Hence, I wonder why the onus for reform and so on falls on *CMAJ* rather than on the CMA leadership, especially given the history of its relationship with the journal.

I would be interested to learn whether the membership was consulted or informed about this decision before it was taken. If the membership was not part of this vital decision, perhaps the logical next step is not to focus on the journal and its stalwart hanging-in editors, but rather on the CMA itself.

**Ivan B. Pless MD**

McGill University, Montréal, Que.

## References

1. Kelsall D, Patrick K, Stanbrook MB, et al. Upholding the integrity of your *CMAJ*. *CMAJ* 2016; 188:397.

2. CMA Board of Directors announces restructuring and modernization plan for *CMAJ*. Available: [www.cma.ca/En/Pages/cma-board-of-directors-announces-restructuring-and-modernization-plan-for-the-cma-journal.aspx](http://www.cma.ca/En/Pages/cma-board-of-directors-announces-restructuring-and-modernization-plan-for-the-cma-journal.aspx) (accessed 2016 Mar. 7).

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I thought we had been through this in 2006, when the CMA fired Dr. John Hoey and resolved it would not happen again.<sup>1</sup> For a time, I withdrew any contributions from *CMAJ*, including submissions and peer review, and encouraged colleagues not to support a journal that appeared to have been stripped of its editorial freedom.

Now the CMA Board, or whom ever it takes instruction from, appears to have repeated its mistake.<sup>2</sup>

Our *CMAJ* helped pioneer reform in medical publishing through enhanced oversight and transparency of conflict of interest and mandatory clinical trial registration. With other small national medical journals in Croatia, Denmark and New Zealand, *CMAJ* exerted crucial influence in the international movement to increase truth and reduce distortions or outright lies in medical scientific publishing. Many courageous and insightful people have participated in this ongoing reform, but Canadian physicians and academics punch well above our weight.

What is wrong with a CMA Board that fails to recognize *CMAJ*'s accomplishments? As the former Journal Oversight Committee members lament, why has the Board not learned from the past or Dick Pound's constructive criticism?<sup>3</sup>

I am astonished and disappointed that CMA leaders don't appear to feel any responsibility to communicate frankly with CMA members. Why was Dr. John Fletcher fired? Why was the Journal Oversight Committee dismissed?

The University of British Columbia has learned recently that avoiding questions about the mysterious firing of its president simply undermines confidence in the board and ensures that unresolved issues continue to simmer. Just because many CMA members don't bother to vote in Board elections does not mean it's OK for the board to rule by divine right.

From respect for *CMAJ*'s remaining editors and the journal's accomplishments, I will continue to volun-