

MEDICAL PUBLISHING

CMAJ enters for-profit market

The *CMAJ* is poised to enter the world of profit-driven companies on Jan. 1 when CMA Publications will be sold for \$4.2 million to the CMA's financial investment arm, CMA Holdings.

It's hoped the move will ultimately generate adequate resources for necessary re-investment in *CMAJ* so it can retain its status as one of the world's leading medical journals, says editor John Hoey. "If we start running it at a profit, some of those profits will go back into the journal and make it stronger."

CMA Secretary-General Bill Tholl says the shifting landscape of the medical publishing industry, as well as the prospect of generating publishing profits for use in delivering other member services, prompted the decision to sell CMA Publications.

Government reductions in postal subsidies and the possible elimination of federal grants (which collectively amounted to roughly \$500 000 year), mean that *CMAJ* could potentially be

a long-term drain on association coffers, particularly with the brand-name pharmaceutical industry drastically scaling back journal advertising outlays, Tholl said.

Moving to a "for-profit model" of operations will allow the \$10-million per year publications group to achieve a firmer financial footing, Tholl added. Along with tax breaks accruing from commercial status, the group anticipates exploring new advertising markets, as well as possible revenue streams in the form of new electronic products and expanded international sales, particularly in emerging markets such as China, Tholl said. "We think there's a tremendous opportunity to diversify our revenue sources."

Graham Morris, president of CMA Publications, says although *CMAJ* will continue to serve as the "flagship" of the publications group, future profits will be reinvested in either acquisitions or the creation of new titles. Morris,

who took on the job Apr. 1, doesn't see the need to increase staff at present. "But clearly if we decide to add another publication different from the *CMAJ* on another topic, then we'd have to get more staff."

In addition to *CMAJ*, CMA Publications produces books and 5 specialty journals.

More immediate objectives include publishing a number of special print products next year, on topics such as the impact of information technology on medical practice and alternative payment plans, Morris added.

The *CMAJ* Oversight Committee will continue to operate, thereby ensuring editorial independence and allaying potential conflicts with political objectives of the association's lobbying arm (*CMAJ* 2003;168[3]:287-8).

Physicians will continue to receive their free subscription to *CMAJ* as a benefit of association membership "for the foreseeable future," Tholl says. — *Wayne Kondro, Ottawa*

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MEDICAL ETHICS

BC and Alberta crack down on cosmetic surgery prizes

Physician regulatory bodies in BC and Alberta are cracking down on plastic surgeons who promote their services in "extreme makeover" and other contests.

Last summer's Vancouver Extraordinary Makeover Experience, where 2 participants won \$100 000 in prizes, didn't sit well with the regulatory bodies.

"It's distasteful. We're trying to put brakes on this," said Dr. Peter Seland, deputy registrar (ethics) of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of BC.

The college added prizes to its list of promotional activities deemed "inappropriate." It warned that physicians would be obliged to provide the surgery even if the patient were unsuitable, that the validity of informed

consent could be challenged and that prizes for surgery diminish public vigilance "for the potential serious consequences of medical or surgical intervention."

The guidelines do not expressly prohibit prizes, said Seland.

The Alberta College voted unanimously this fall to prohibit doctors from using discount coupons, early bird specials, time-limited prices and contests to attract patients. In September, a Calgary nightclub had offered female patrons a chance to win free breast implants, worth \$6500.

The Vancouver contest organizer Holly Carinci called the college's opposition "hypocrisy." She said, "The message they're getting across is if you have a

deep pocketbook, it's okay with us if you go to our surgeons."

Due to the controversy surrounding the competition, Vancouver contest sponsor Dr. Mark Godley of the False Creek Surgical Centre decided not to supply the prize surgery. He did not reply to an interview request from *CMAJ*. Instead the surgery was done in Winnipeg. One winner, Dana Gill, 26, had abdominoplasty, liposuction, breast augmentation and rhinoplasty.

The Vancouver Women's Health Collective, which protested the contest, welcomed the crackdown by the Alberta and BC colleges.

"I hope that all provinces follow suit," said spokeswoman Caryn Duncan. — *Deborah Jones, Vancouver*

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