

Letters

- The departure of death notices
- Testimonials versus evidence

The departure of death notices

I thought I would share my displeasure upon learning that death notices will no longer be published in *CMAJ*.¹ They are, perhaps oddly, my favourite part of the Journal, and I have been reading them since I started medical school.

I find the life stories to be compelling. There have been stories of physicians who served in the military during the world wars, who moved to practise in Canada from every corner of the earth and who took all kinds of fascinating paths in life. I have been inspired by female physicians who went through medical school when few women did. The Deaths page has also been a nice forum for recognizing the other side to physicians' lives: their families and extracurricular pursuits. Such recognition almost never occurs in a public way during our careers.

I find the back-page obituaries to be a very human touch in *CMAJ*. Please keep them where they belong.

Adrienne Vraets MD
Lindsay, Ont.

Competing interests: None declared.

REFERENCE

1. Deaths. *CMAJ* 2008;178:1735.
DOI:10.1503/cmaj.108-0089

Editor's reply

As of July 1, 2008, *CMAJ* discontinued the Deaths department. It was a difficult decision, which we took for several

reasons. Most importantly, we appreciated that we were not doing a very thorough job at providing this information. Because of space and human resource limitations, we were providing only the most basic of details (in most cases). This seemed not only inadequate but also disrespectful.

In addition, the obituary notices published pertained only to members of the Canadian Medical Association. Thus, they did not reflect the entire population of Canadian physicians. In effect, the listings were a membership service. We therefore decided that the listings more properly belonged on the CMA website (www.cma.ca/index.cfm/ci_id/86505/la_id/1.htm).

We encourage you to visit the CMA website where you will find a comprehensive, up-to-date listing.

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Competing interests: See www.cmaj.ca/misc/edboard.shtml.

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Testimonials versus evidence

I was interested in Dan Gardner's musings about why the media may prefer bad news to good news, and why stories matter more than statistics.¹ I believe that something similar operates in the minds of many patients, for whom anecdotes matter more than evidence.

Many of my patients will not consider taking a therapy supported by evidence (e.g., ramipril for cardiac risk reduction), but they will gladly pay for and consume products supported by testimonials (e.g., glyconutrients to improve health). They bring me brochures and compact discs with glowing accounts of how a person's life was changed by a particular product, hoping that I will recommend this

treatment to my other patients.

I believe that a patient's decision to accept or reject a particular therapy depends more on how they feel about it than what they think about it. Moving stories influence our feelings more than cold, hard numbers and facts. How can we bridge the gap between the evidence-based physician and the testimonial-based patient?

Mark Diotallevi MD
Family physician, Mitchell, Ont.

Competing interests: None declared.

REFERENCE

1. Gardner D. Numbers are nice, but stories matter. *CMAJ* 2008;179:108.
DOI:10.1503/cmaj.108-0084

Corrections

In a recent Analysis article,¹ the second affiliation listed for Ryan Zarychanski should have been the Ottawa Health Research Institute.

REFERENCE

1. Zarychanski R, Houston DS. Anemia of chronic disease: A harmful disorder or an adaptive, beneficial response? *CMAJ* 2008;179:333-7.
DOI:10.1503/cmaj.081185

In a News article in the July 29 issue about Canada's medical participation at the Beijing Olympics, the caption under the photograph on page 224 contains an error.¹ The physician depicted in the photo is, in fact, Dr. Andrew Pipe. *CMAJ* apologizes for any confusion or inconvenience that this error may have caused.

REFERENCE

1. Mason C. Medical Team Canada: bouncing to Beijing in aid of the medal haul. *CMAJ* 2008;179:222-4.
DOI:10.1503/cmaj.081183