

## LETTERS

### Apology from *CMAJ*'s editor-in-chief

Sexism is one of the most important issues facing the medical profession. Women are less likely to be promoted, less likely to attain positions of leadership, are paid less than men and more frequently experience micro- and macroaggressions at work.<sup>1</sup>

*CMAJ* recently published a piece in our Encounters section called "Sexism in medical care: 'Nurse can you get me another blanket?'"<sup>2</sup> Using the example of a patient assuming a female physician to be a nurse, the authors suggest strategies to address sexism in the health care workplace, which they intended to be both humorous and helpful.

Unfortunately, the article did not hit the mark.

Although the authors recognized the important role of nurses in caring for patients, it is entirely understandable that nurses and many others found the article's focus on the mistaken identity with nurses to be offensive.

And, as has been pointed out in some responses to the article, female physicians

face many more important and ingrained manifestations of sexism within the medical profession itself and in society.<sup>3</sup> This article appears to make light of those problems. The suggestion that "... a credible masculine [physician] voice can be quite convincing for some patients" reinforces rather than addresses sexism within the profession.

The article went through *CMAJ*'s peer review process for the Encounters section. As editor-in-chief I had the opportunity to stop publication and I did not do so. That was a mistake. Regardless of the good intentions of the authors, *CMAJ* should not have published an article that made light of a crucial issue that affects more than half of Canada's young physicians. I apologize for my mistake.

We are immediately changing the way our Encounters submissions are reviewed and will work hard to ensure something similar does not happen again.

As well, *CMAJ* will be commissioning a review of sexism in medicine in Canada and the solutions needed to address it.

I thank everyone who has raised concerns by writing letters to the editor,

both public and personal. Although some personal letters have called for the article's retraction, the article doesn't meet the criteria for retraction outlined in the Committee on Publication Ethics guidelines.<sup>4</sup> We welcome all readers to share their opinions via the post-publication peer review process that is this e-letter forum.

#### Andreas Laupacis MD MSc

Editor-in-chief, *CMAJ*

■ Cite as: *CMAJ* 2020 March 23;192:E321. doi: 10.1503/cmaj.74914

#### References

1. Holroyd-Leduc JM, Straus SE. #MeToo and the medical profession. *CMAJ* 2018;190:E972-3.
2. Manzoor F, Redelmeier DA. Sexism in medical care: "Nurse can you get me another blanket?". *CMAJ* 2020;192:E119-20.
3. Sharma M. A feminist in the academy. *CMAJ* 2017;189:E1398-9.
4. Committee on Publication Ethics. Retraction guidelines. Hampshire (UK): COPE. Available: <https://publicationethics.org/retraction-guidelines> (accessed 2020 Feb. 14).

**Competing interests:** See [www.cmaj.ca/site/misc/cmaj\\_staff.xhtml](http://www.cmaj.ca/site/misc/cmaj_staff.xhtml)