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Dr. Bruce Squires, 1934-2011: CMAJ Editor, mentor and friend

Dr. Bruce Squires was once introduced to delegates at a Canadian Medical Association leadership conference as a world-renowned leader on medical journals. He laughed at the notion, dismissing it in a recent interview as being “overblown,” although he allowed that he “wrote about it more than others did.”

The humble comment was typical of Squires, who in his lengthy career also became globally revered for his mentorship, his knowledge of journals and his unstinting sense of humour. Squires passed away on the morning of May 11, 2011, a day after celebrating his 77th birthday.

Squires was editor-in-chief at *CMAJ* from 1989 to 1996. He began working at the journal in 1984 as an assistant editor, then scientific co-editor (1986), and scientific editor (1987) before assuming the journal’s helm.

He was born May 10, 1934 in Toronto, Ontario and earned his Bachelor of Arts at the University of Western Ontario in London, Ontario. He subsequently obtained a medical degree (1958) and a doctorate in medical research (1962) from the same institution. Following a postdoctoral fellowship in endocrinology at Duke University Hospital in Durham, North Carolina, Squires returned to Western in 1965 as an assistant professor of physiology, rising to full professor status by 1982.

Writing was always an integral part of his career. Six editions of his instructor’s manual and study guide, *Physiology of the Human Body* (Saunders; 1979), were published and he penned an array of articles, including more than 120 editorials for *CMAJ*.

Over the course of career, his laurels multiplied. Western honoured him with the Douglas Bocking Award for excellence in medical education, while the American Medical Writers Association named him an honorary fellow. For his many contributions, *CMAJ* created the Squires Award, which since 2008 has been awarded annually to the authors of the journal’s best research article in the calendar year.

In a recent interview for an article on *CMAJ*’s 100th anniversary, Squires mused that the most significant change that occurred during his 13-year tenure at the helm of the journal was the increased pressure to publish quality research. The pressure was the product of demands from the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors, from researchers in Canada, and from the CONSORT group, which developed the Consolidated Standards of Reporting Trials to alleviate problems associated from inadequate reporting of randomized controlled trials. It forced much more rigorous and systematic appraisal of research, Squires said.

When he became Editor-in-Chief, *CMAJ* was primarily publishing observational studies, as it had since 1911, and the transition was tricky, Squires said. Ex-editor-in-chief Peter J. Morgan “and I had a lot of intense arguments regarding what should be in a manuscript and how to do it.”

But 22 years in academia served him well in affecting the necessary changes, Squires said.

For his part, Morgan says Squires' strength as an editor was his "careful use of language and precision," and the meticulous care he took with all facets of the journal. "He did improve the quality."

Squires threw himself wholeheartedly into improving the journal. Whereas editors of other journals weighed in on contentious public policy issues, he often chose to scour his own backyard with editorials aimed squarely at improving research standards and reporting. His hugely popular series, "What editors want from authors and peer reviewers," covered the spectrum: from biomedical reviews to case reports, editorials to descriptive studies, biomedical statistics to illustrative materials.

"He was the first to formalize the peer review process at the journal and help authors, peer reviewers and, by extension, editors at other journals, to learn," says Kate Schissler, a manuscript editor at the journal since 1985.

"He was always willing to teach," she adds. "And had complete trust in us." Schissler recalls Squires with fondness and admired his "infectious" sense of humour. "He must have been reincarnated from a clown; he loved to stir it up."

Pat Sullivan, who worked with Squires for a decade as CMAJ's news editor, concurs. "Bruce combined a superior intellect with a great sense of humour. ... Things were never dull. I'm one of many, many people who will miss him."

With that humour came solid principles, recalls former CMA publisher, Stephen Prud'homme. "He helped to frame for me — and the ICMJE [International Council of Medical Journal Editors] — ethical issues, such as a conflict-of-interest and privacy. He set his parameters and always took the high road."

He was also a "great friend, a mentor and a delight," Prud'homme adds.

Add to that list an inspired leader in the world of medical journals. In 1995, Squires cofounded the World Association of Medical Editors (www.wame.org), which he later described as having been "put together to help the smaller or less economically advantaged journals, most of which have part-time, volunteer editors with fixed terms and very little experience."

He became mentor to editors in 77 countries, before stepping down from the association's board in 2004 but continued to run its listserv for many years. WAME members now tally 965 journals in 92 countries.

"He united medical editors of the world," Dr. Ana Marušić, coeditor of the *Croatian Medical Journal* writes in an email. "He gave them strength of unity in the love for the editorial profession and the wealth of differences and visions. WAME is his legacy that lives on, ever stronger."

Always willing to donate time to the development of the world's journals, Squires participated in the founding meeting of the Forum of African Medical Editors and was also an honorary member of the Eastern Mediterranean Association of Medical Editors.

After retiring from CMAJ, Squires served as an adjunct professor (epidemiology and community medicine) at the University of Ottawa (2003-2006) in Ontario and a consulting medical editor. In 2006, he returned to the journal as Editor emeritus.

He is survived by his wife of 47 years, Patricia (McBane), daughter Patti, son Bruce (Vice-President, Corporate Affairs, CMA), daughter-in-law Joanne Kennedy and

three grandchildren, Grady, Ella and Audrey. Funeral services will be held at 10 a.m., Saturday, May 14, 2011 at the Church of St. Barnabas, 70 James Street, Ottawa, Ontario.
— Barbara Sibbald, *CMAJ*

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