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. 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. 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; 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.

As a Canadian physician, I am increasingly embarrassed. Undoubtedly, the firing of CMAJ’s editor-in-chief and disbandment of the Journal Oversight Committee is about money, not a falling reputation.

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 to focus on the journal and its stalwart hanging-in editors, but rather on the CMAJ itself.

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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.

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References


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References