Canadian medical journal faces threat from new online rival

David Spurgeon *Quebec*

The journal of the Canadian Medical Association, *CMAJ*, whose editor and deputy editor were dismissed in February in a fight over editorial independence (*BMJ* 2006;332:503), may have to compete with a new open access journal. It is being created by former *CMAJ* editors, including the deputy editor, Anne-Marie Todkill, and editorial board members.

The new journal, *Open Medicine*, is a "Canadian health and clinical medicine journal dedicated to furthering integrity, independence, and open access in scholarly publishing," says its website, www.openmedicine.ca. The site is currently under development, although the journal

is accepting and reviewing manuscripts.

The website says that *Open Medicine* will help international researchers, policy makers, practitioners, and the public understand health and health care, improve clinical practice, and encourage open discussion and dialogue on all health related issues.

On 3 August *CMAJ* published an online editorial outlining its new governance plan, which, the editorial says, has resulted in a "renewed atmosphere of trust, integrity and good faith that will allow *CMAJ* to press forward at good speed."

However, an opinion article in

the *New England Journal of Medicine* by Robert Steinbrook (2006;355:547), a national correspondent for the *New England Journal*, notes that the recent report conducted by the *CMAJ*'s governance review panel is silent on the underlying reasons for the sacking of its editor in chief, John Hoey, and his deputy editor, Ms Todkill. Dr Steinbrook adds that "it remains to be seen how [*CMAJ*] will fare in the months and years ahead."

The sacking of the editors led to the resignation of most of the journal's editorial board, as well as drawing widespread international criticism and calls for *CMAJ* to be replaced.

Ms Todkill said that the panel's report will be very helpful for any editor who has a problem maintaining editorial independence, but "the fact still is that the *CMAJ* is very closely associated with the association." □

She said, "They [the association] have their own political and strategic interests ... Much depends on the individual players and on the new editor and the relationship the editor has with the association."

She and seven others (mostly former editors of *CMAJ*) plan to launch *Open Medicine* this autumn. The open access journal will be published online only, without a printed version. She said the journal will have an international emphasis, something that was "somewhat tough going at *CMAJ*, because it has Canadian physicians primarily in mind."

The journal will be free of institutional and commercial ties, she said. Initially the journal will be funded through voluntary contributions from authors and readers. It will carry advertisements, though not those of drug companies. □

Violence in Darfur region is jeopardising world's largest aid operation

Peter Moszynski *London*

Humanitarian operations in Darfur are threatened by an upsurge of violence against relief personnel, the United Nations has warned.

"During the second half of July we lost more aid workers than over the previous two years," said Mike McDonagh, humanitarian affairs officer at the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Khartoum.

The main reasons for violence against humanitarian workers are tension and rumours among the local population. "We are now in the third—and for some the fourth—rainy season, and the displaced people are still living in camps," Mr McDonagh said. "There is enormous frustration and a lack of hope among many of them."

The UN office in Khartoum says that insecurity has risen since the fragmentation of various rebel groups after the signing of the 5 May peace agreement

between the Sudanese government and one of the three rebel factions. Fighting between those who did and those who didn't sign the agreement has escalated.

The relief agency Oxfam announced that a Sudanese staff member had been killed on 27 July in West Darfur, while another agency, Tearfund, confirmed that a Sudanese driver had been killed on 26 July.

On 20 July three water and sanitation workers were beaten to death by a mob in a camp for internally displaced people outside Zalingei. The previous day a driver working for the aid organisation ACT-Caritas was killed.

Earlier a driver working for another international agency was killed by bandits. An aid worker from Relief International was shot dead by an armed gang, and a watchman for Care International was killed in the Kalma camp for internally displaced people.

"The escalating fighting is making humanitarian access very difficult and has greatly reduced planting by the local communities," Mr McDonagh said. "More NGO [non-governmental organisation] cars have been hijacked since the signing of the agreement in May 2006 than over the previous years. The splintering of rebel groups has resulted in a myriad new groups that are completely undisciplined and need cars to

One of the camps for displaced citizens, in Zalingei, where aid staff were beaten to death

get started; non-government agencies are an easy target."

Last week Médecins Sans Frontières announced that it had suspended many of its medical activities—"leaving thousands of patients untreated every day"—after its workers were attacked in several locations. Meanwhile, in a move reminiscent of last year's arrest of the charity's Paul Foreman for spying after the publication of statistics on rape (*BMJ* 2005;330:1350), the Slovenian peace envoy Tomo

Kriznar is currently on trial for espionage, reportedly after uncovering evidence of mass graves in Darfur.

The UN's secretary general, Kofi Annan, is urging the Sudanese government to accept UN peacekeepers. He said, "International involvement will increase the chances of peace taking root in Darfur [and] will strengthen the credibility of the peace process and the protection of the suffering populations of Darfur." □