LETTER TO THE EDITOR

To the Editor:

Faced with an increasing amount of medical information, peer-reviewed journals have the increasing responsibility of providing unbiased, balanced and trustworthy information to health care professionals, stakeholders, governing bodies and the general public. The peer-review process is a critical element in the development and management of our health care system and the improvement of health outcomes.

The topic of editorial independence has been discussed many times in this journal by the Editor-in-Chief, Dr Eldon Smith (1-3), and by myself (4). However, the high level of interest from Canadian physicians, the media and the general public regarding the personnel changes at the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* (CMAJ) compels me, as a Publisher of peer-review journals, to address the issue again. It also offers me the opportunity to reinforce the importance of clearly separating the roles of the content decision-maker (Editor-in-Chief) and the producer (Publisher).

Although they are both peer-reviewed journals, *The Canadian Journal of Cardiology* (the *Journal*) differs from the CMAJ in that the *Journal* does not contain articles written in-house that could be considered investigative reporting. That being said, the fundamental principles of peer review publishing must still be applied – the content is determined by the Editor-in-Chief and the Editorial Board, who have full editorial autonomy and are completely independent of the business aspects of publishing.

In a survey of the editors of 33 medical journals owned by associations in the United States, 30% reported not having complete editorial freedom. Indeed, a substantial minority reported having received some pressure over editorial content from their ownership (5).

This is certainly not the case with the journals owned and published by Pulsus Group and endorsed by their relevant Canadian medical societies. While Pulsus Group is responsible for producing the *Journal* in a commercially viable manner, it has no control over the Editor-in-Chief or the content. And the Canadian Cardiovascular Society, which receives a portion of the revenues, benefits whether its journal is profitable or not. The financial risk lies solely with Pulsus Group, and the responsibility for content lies solely with the Editor-in-Chief and the Editorial Board. In this way, the financial interests of the *Journal* cannot in any way influence the editorial content, and the integrity of the peer-review process is maintained.

The process that we began 22 years ago with the launch of *The Canadian Journal of Cardiology* has withstood the test of time. The collaborative efforts of four groups – the Editors, Association, Publisher and Advertisers – each with separate and distinct objectives and responsibilities, work together to create a journal that none of us could create on our own. It's not always an easy task, but the outcome is certainly worth the effort.

Robert B Kalina
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