

## Editorial Independence Surrounding Controversies

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*The World Association of Medical Editors* defines editorial independence as: full control over the editorial content of the journal, regardless of conflicts with the commercial success of the publication or the owners' interests.<sup>(1)</sup> Fortunately, our *Editorial Advisory Board* recently met to discuss this issue. Separation of the editorial decisions from financial issues is essential to ensure editorial independence. There are outright threats to continued editorial independence. We reaffirm the core value of editorial freedom. *The Committee on Publication Ethics* has published a draft code of conduct for medical editors proposing a framework in detail for the relationship between the journal editors and the owners.<sup>(2)</sup> The role of the editors is to ensure accuracy of the material published for which they have to rely on the authors as well as an efficient review process. Authors should submit the ethical clearance or approval by the ethics committee for any research work. However, the editor is still responsible for checking out if there is any unethical work submitted for publication.

The controversy surrounding most of journals appears to focus on whether the associations which are the owners of a journal can offer complete independence to its editors. For instance, one decisive issue is advertising; policy and practices with respect to advertising and sponsorship must be clear. To date, no systematic review has been done to evaluate the level of separation of advertising and editorial decisions.<sup>(3)</sup> Editorial decisions should not be influenced by advertising or sponsorship, being made without consideration of the advertising or sponsorship scheduled to appear. We emphasize that separation of editorial decisions from financial issues is essential to ensure editorial independence.

The other issue that must be dealt with by the editor is scientific misconduct. Obviously, the goal of a scientific journal, searching for scientific truths, should not be confused with those of the public press. Usually, editors are the first to detect any possible misconduct by all the people involved in the course of publication of any article. While they protect the confidentiality of unconfirmed cases, they have the duty to scrutinize, inform the authors, and ask for explanation. On the other hand, all reasonable critical responses to any published material should be published in the form of a

"Letter to Editor," unless the editors have a convincing reason for not doing so.

In our journal's policy, complying with the guidelines of *the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors*<sup>(4)</sup> has been adopted, in which the definition of editorial freedom by *the World Association of Medical Editors* has been considered<sup>(1)</sup>:

*Editors-in-Chief and the owners of their journals both want the journals to succeed but they have different roles. The editors-in-chief's primary responsibilities are to inform and educate readers, with attention to the accuracy and importance of journal articles, and to protect and strengthen the integrity and quality of the journal and its processes. Owners (whether professional associations or for-profit companies) support the core values and policies of their organization and are ultimately responsible for all aspects of publishing the journal, including its staff, budget, and business policies. The relationship between owners and editors-in-chief should be based on mutual respect and trust, and recognition of each other's authority and responsibilities. Conflicts can damage both the intellectual integrity and reputation of the journal and its financial success.*

Thus, the Editor-in-Chief will take full responsibility for editorial content and failure to autonomously scrutinize and investigate any possible misconduct corresponds to a shortcoming on the editor's part.

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