

◆ The Lundberg Dismissal: Longer-Term Reflections

On 15 January 1999, Dr E Ratcliffe Anderson Jr, the American Medical Association's executive vice president, fired Dr George Lundberg as editor-in-chief of the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA). Anderson cited the publication of a research article on the sexual attitudes of college students as an important factor in the firing. The article, which reported that roughly 60% of respondents did not consider engaging in oral sex as "having sex", was fast-tracked for publication by Lundberg to coincide with the Clinton impeachment hearings. Anderson condemned this rapid publication, stating that Lundberg had "inappropriately and inexcusably [interjected] JAMA into a major political debate that has nothing to do with science or medicine." Anderson stated, moreover, that he had over time "lost confidence and trust" in Lundberg's abilities (1).

This event sparked immediate and intense debate by many informed observers; indeed, strong opinions were voiced publicly in the form of editorials from the staff of JAMA itself (2) and from the editor of The New England Journal of Medicine (3), position statements on the Web sites of various journals and professional organizations (4,5), and electronic postings (6). No doubt more private exchanges took place as well. At the same time, some took a moment to give attention to the complex issues raised by the Lundberg firing: When

and how should scholarly journals, if ever, participate in political debates? When can a parent organization fire an editor for publishing a manuscript? What are editors' responsibilities to parent organizations and vice versa?

This section offers both opinion and analysis. At our request, 2 journal editors have presented views on the Lundberg firing: Dr Dan J Ncayiyana, editor of the South African Medical Journal, secretary of the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME), and CBE member; and Dr Addeane S Caelleigh, editor of Academic Medicine, WAME member, and long-time CBE member. Dr Edward J Huth, editor emeritus of Annals of Internal Medicine and former CBE president, has offered a thoughtful analysis of some issues raised by the Lundberg firing, focusing on the special relationship between editors and parent organizations. He also suggests a plan for addressing some of the challenges that both editors and parent organizations face as they attempt to carry out the business at hand, often with differing agendas.

We hope you will find this section thought-provoking and useful. ■

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Editor's Note:

George Lundberg has now become editor-in-chief of the medical Web site Medscape (www.medscape.com) and of Medscape General Medicine, a new medical journal that is entirely electronic.