

The Relationship between Journal Editors and Journal Owners

Panelists:

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Journal of the American Medical Association
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The relationship between journal editors and journal owners has received increased attention since the dismissal in 1999 of George Lundberg as editor of the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)*. Two journal editors and the head of a press that owns three journals addressed aspects of the relationship.

Catherine DeAngelis, editor of *JAMA*, focused mainly on the editorial-governance plan instituted for *JAMA* after Lundberg's dismissal. The plan includes the following features:

- A seven-member journal oversight committee evaluates the editor annually, serves as a buffer between the editor and the management of the American Medical Association (AMA), and considers issues that arise between the journal and AMA. The committee consists of one member of AMA senior management, one outside person with experience in the publishing business, and representatives of the scientific, edi-

torial, peer-reviewer, contributor, and medical communities.

- The role of the oversight committee includes reviewing and making recommendations, when needed, to ensure the editorial independence of *JAMA* and the other AMA journals.
- Any proposal to dismiss the editor must go to the oversight committee for evaluation and a vote. A two-thirds vote of the AMA Board of Trustees is then required to dismiss the editor.
- The editor receives a 5-year contract. If the editor is dismissed other than for cause, he or she will be paid for the time remaining on the contract but at least 12 months' salary.

The editorial governance plan has appeared in *JAMA*.¹

Frank Davidoff, editor of *Annals of Internal Medicine*, noted that complex relationships exist among three parties at journals: the editor, the publisher, and the owner (the latter two might be the same). The two immediately preceding editors of *Annals* also served as senior vice presidents for publishing in the journal's parent organization, the American College of Physicians. Because of the potential for conflict of interest, he said, the two roles are now held by different persons.

Davidoff shared with the audience a draft of a statement, "The Relationship Between Journal Editors-in-Chief and Owners", that the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME) was preparing. The statement included the following points:

- Conditions of editors' employment should be explicit. Items specified should include editors' authority, duties, and length of term. Mechanisms for conflict resolution should be stated.
- Editors should have full authority over

editorial content.

- Editorial decisions should be based mainly on the value of the work submitted, not on commercial implications for the journal.
- Editors should be fired only for substantive reasons.
- The editor should report to the highest governing body of the owning organization, not to an individual.

The statement, which Davidoff termed "a very concise and very well thought out document", has now been posted on the WAME Web site.²

Michael Held, director of Rockefeller University Press, described the administration of the three journals owned by the press: *The Journal of Experimental Medicine*, *The Journal of General Physiology*, and *The Journal of Cell Biology*. He noted that the editors of all three "have full authority over the editorial content and full editorial independence". Each editor is an active academic scientist and receives a small honorarium for being editor; each journal also has an executive editor or managing editor, who is an employee of the press. The editors are not directly involved in the financial management of their journals, but they are consulted about editorial budgets and such items as page charges. 

References

1. Editorial governance plan for *JAMA*. *JAMA* 1999;281:2240-2.
2. The relationship between journal editors-in-chief and owners. www.wame.org/statemt.htm. Accessed 23 Nov 2000.