

CMAJ's next chapter

Diane Kelsall MD MEd

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In early 2016, *CMAJ* underwent a seismic shift when the Canadian Medical Association (CMA) fired the previous editor-in-chief, Dr. John Fletcher, and disbanded the journal's oversight committee.¹ Three and a half years later, the journal will soon be welcoming its new editor-in-chief, Dr. Andreas Laupacis, following a comprehensive international search.

During my tenure as interim editor-in-chief, it has been my privilege to work to ensure that *CMAJ* is delivered to its new custodian in good shape — not just surviving, but thriving as a journal supported and protected by robust governance. A journal with a clear mission, vision and values, and a strong, competent team in a functional organizational structure. A revitalized journal that has transformed substantially to respond to a changing publishing environment. The building blocks are in place for success but, as with any transition, the new editor will face some challenges.

In the wake of the events of 2016, the CMA set up a task force to consult on the vision and governance of the journal. With my participation as interim editor-in-chief and that of deputy editor Dr. Kirsten Patrick, the task force entered into a broad consultative process that resulted in a new governance structure.² Key to the journal's governance is the CMAJ Governance Council that has the mandate to steward and promote the overall well-being and integrity of the journal itself, rather than that of any stakeholder.³ The council has been active since early 2018 and participated in the selection of the new editor. It is critical that the council's responsibility to support *CMAJ* in achieving its mission, vision and values is central to all its deliberations and decisions.

Relationships between owners of journals and editors can be tricky at times. The governance of *CMAJ* is structured to protect the journal's editorial independence, which the CMA recognizes as being essential for *CMAJ*'s success.⁴ A robust governance structure is not enough to ensure editorial independence though. Trust is also needed.

With the sale of its subsidiary MD Financial Management, CMA has been restructuring the enterprise governance, including that of Joule, the subsidiary that currently owns *CMAJ*. These enterprise changes will likely require reopening of the terms of reference and policies that make up *CMAJ*'s governance. It took nearly a year and a heavy investment by the enterprise and the journal to develop the current structure. The new editor will need to be involved in any revision process to ensure that provisions protecting the journal and its editorial independence remain firmly in place.

In any survey of CMA members, *CMAJ* is always ranked as one of the most important member benefits, which speaks to the members' appreciation of the journal's broad influence on clinical practice and health policy. As Canada's leading medical journal, *CMAJ* is widely viewed as a public good, with content on its many channels shared extensively both nationally and internationally. The CMA now finds itself in an enviable financial situation compared with similar associations worldwide. With a new editor at the helm, the timing is fortuitous for an increased commitment — financial and otherwise — by the enterprise to broadening *CMAJ*'s impact. The CMAJ Group has the capability to be a knowledge powerhouse across the country — and a resource for all Canadians.

The success of *CMAJ* in working toward its mission — to champion knowledge that matters for the health of Canadians and the rest of the world — depends on many people. I have led a great team that responded enthusiastically and with impeccable professionalism to the myriad challenges we faced over the past few years. I am grateful for the support I received from so many in this three-and-a-half-year interim period, both inside and outside the organization. My thanks go too to the the CMAJ Editorial Advisory Board, members, authors, reviewers and readers who backed *CMAJ* during one of its most rocky times and who are vigilant in ensuring that their journal is cared for well.

As I soon pass the leadership of *CMAJ* to its new editor, I am confident that it will be in good hands.

References

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Competing interests: See www.cmaj.ca/site/misc/cmaj_staff.xhtml

Affiliation: Editor-in-Chief (interim), *CMAJ*

Correspondence to: *CMAJ* editor, cmaj@cmajgroup.ca