

Stewarding our community's journal

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Over the past decades the *Canadian Journal of Respiratory Therapy* has grown remarkably. Its evolution to its current status as an internationally respected scientific publication that serves to inform the practice of respiratory therapists has occurred alongside a drive for scholarship that has been maturing more widely within in our profession.

It has always been the role of the editorial board to steward and safeguard the *Canadian Journal of Respiratory Therapy* as an important component of the architecture of our growing community. To that end the *Journal* maintains an editorial board membership that represents the breadth of the profession's areas of practice and, importantly, offers the *Journal* a range of perspectives and insights into the practice of scientific publication.

Currently, the editorial board of this *Journal* is embarking on a strategic planning process that will extend its current momentum over the near and long term. Of specific interest to the board will be strategies that serve to enhance the applicability of the publication to an expanding audience. There are many exciting initiatives already in the works that we believe will make important advances relative to these goals. However, as an editorial board we also acknowledge the paramount importance of our primary role—vigilantly safeguarding the integrity of the *Journal*. With unfortunate widespread evidence of irresponsible publishing practices and rising retraction rates over recent years, the important role of editorial boards in ensuring the quality of published information sources has been heightened [1].

Respiratory therapy represents a relatively small community where national leadership is often provided by dedicated volunteers who caringly contribute to our shared advancement. This too is the case with respect to the editorial leadership of this *Journal*. Consequently, throughout our professional lives we are often called upon to contribute in a variety of ways, often requiring us to undertake several roles concurrently. This, coupled with the interaction and strong bonds that have historically existed between respiratory therapists and our industry partners, professional associations, and academic institutions, it is easy to conceive how competing interests may arise at these intersections.

In the context of scientific publishing, it is incumbent upon editorial boards to implement stringent measures to manage any conflicting interests. Typically we think of conflicts of interest that may surface with respect to an author or group of authors relative to their published works. This could, for example, include undisclosed financial gain for an author emanating from the published works—potentially undermining the integrity of a publication. As the financial ties of authors have been demonstrated to be associated with more favourable clinical outcomes in trials [2], this illustration highlights the need for robust editorial safeguards. Accordingly, the editorial processes of this *Journal* have been designed to equip the editorial board to deal with such instances. For example, disclosure of potential conflicts are required to be reported by as potential authors for review by the editorial board who appraise the risk of such conflict to the integrity of the publication [3].

Similarly, it is important to note that editorial boards themselves are not immune from potential conflicts of interest. The occurrence of such conflict may be most evident when considering the case of an editorial board member publishing within the journal on which editorial board they serve. This is not uncommon in professional communities the size of respiratory therapy and, in fact, arises with some regularity.



Andrew West

Again, the editorial processes of the *Canadian Journal of Respiratory Therapy* are carefully and rigorously enacted to mitigate these conflicts of interest and have always ensured that every editorial board member regularly disclose all real or perceived conflicts of interest. In general terms, when making editorial decisions such real or perceived conflicts are carefully scrutinized and, whenever necessary, individual board members (including the Editor-in-Chief) are promptly excluded from the editorial process and any decisions related to that point of conflict. It is worth noting that these publication safeguards are entirely consistent with those recommended by the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE), the most widely accepted and endorsed publishing guidelines globally. As is the practice of this *Journal*, it is important for editorial board members who make final decisions about manuscripts to excuse

themselves from decision-making where they may have personal, professional, or financial involvement in any of the issues they might judge [4].

The need for reflection on the potential impacts of holding dual roles has recently become personally pertinent as I prepare to undertake a position later this year as the Chief Executive Officer of the Canadian Society of Respiratory Therapists, the proprietary organization of this *Journal*. Engaging in these dual operational and editorial roles requires transparency and special attention to maintaining our rigorous publication standards. In the interest of optimizing the long-term operational and editorial effectiveness of the *Canadian Journal of Respiratory Therapy* over the long term, I plan to step aside from my current role to be best positioned to contribute in new ways. To that end, a search for a new Editor-in Chief of this *Journal* is currently underway. In the meantime, our exemplary editorial team and robust editorial standards position us well to continue on with business as usual—informing the practice of respiratory therapists with high-quality published literature.

As always we welcome thoughts and feedback from our readership on the articles in this issue or on the topic of conflict, either in general or pertaining specifically to our board. Please consider submitting a letter to the editor (editor@csrt.com) for publication so we can continue the conversation.



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