EDITORIAL

The Journal of Insurance Medicine

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The recent public firing of George Lundberg, editor of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, focuses reflection on the relationship of a journal to the sponsoring organization, the relationship of the editor to the governing body of that organization, and the content of the journal in relation to the goals of the professional body of which it is the official publication.

RELATIONSHIP OF THE JOURNAL TO THE SPONSORING ORGANIZATION

Organizations must be responsive to their membership, and professional organizations need to have the means to communicate with their individual members. The American Academy of Insurance Medicine is fortunate to have at least 3 methods of passing information in print to its members, namely, the journal, the newsletter, and sporadic mailings. This means that there can be objectives for each situation, and they can either fortify messages when appropriate or avoid overlap. The Editorial Board of the journal developed a set of goals at the end of 1996. These goals were consistent with the mission statement and goals of the Academy at that time and currently remain consistent with the mission statement and strategic goals of the Academy, particularly with reference to the first 3 goals: (1) interpret and evaluate advances in medicine and the delivery of medical care as they apply to the insurance medical director; (2) advance the study of mortality and morbidity as it applies to medicine; and (3) promote learning within insurance medicine and distribute this information through all appropriate Continuing Medical Education and publication channels.

The goals of the journal were predicated on the objective of providing a scientific forum for the professional discipline of insurance medicine and to encourage both members of the Academy and those scientists and researchers who have a special interest in morbidity and mortality studies to publish original data in a peer-reviewed journal.

To make the journal an attractive vehicle for publication and a useful reference source, we established the indexing of the journal as one of our goals.

RELATIONSHIP OF THE EDITOR TO THE GOVERNING BODY OF THE PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATION

Editors may be appointed for a fixed term, or they may be appointed to serve a term of their choosing. Whether there is an explicit policy or implicit understanding, removal from office because of loss of confidence, moral turpitude, or fiscal profligacy is an option for the governing body. For some editors, however, there is a direct employer/employee relationship. The American Sleep Disorders Association conducted a study last year that revealed that of the 64 specialty societies responding to their questionnaire, 26 had editors of their specialty journals. Six organizations had more than 10,000 members, and 20 had fewer members. Of this second group, 18
paid the editors and for 2, the publishers did. The average honorarium/salary of this latter group was $54,000 and ranged between $20,000 and $240,000 (J. A. Barrett, unpublished data, 1998).

In the case of the Journal of Insurance Medicine, at this point it functions as an expense item in the academy's budget, but the Editorial Board is committed to the development of a business plan, in which the journal and the business of running the journal become an independent cost center and may even be able to contribute revenue to the academy. With the journal as an independent cost center, the editor must have certain accountability to the Governing Council of the academy. These will include incorporating industry viewpoints, especially if they are contrary to the editor's opinion, and development of a responsible policy on advertisements and the receipt of funds from industry. At an Executive Council meeting in May 1997, the Executive Council voted funds to support a partial "fellowship" in mortality studies. At this point, the mechanism by which a fellow is selected, managed, monitored, and supported has not been finally decided. It is expected that with the advent of a business plan, a program will be developed.

JOURNAL CONTENT AND GOALS OF THE ACADEMY OF INSURANCE MEDICINE

A professional organization, which is created to support a discipline, necessarily has an implicit or explicit core body of knowledge. The academy is such a repository. Indeed, the academy has a credentialing examination and a process by which it may confer a certification from the American Board of Insurance Medicine. A goal of the journal is to publish original articles, opinions, commentaries, case studies, literature reviews, letters to the editor, and editorials that have some relationship to life insurance and to the core body of knowledge.

The steps taken thus far have been to identify peer reviewers for contributed articles and to implement a peer review process with feedback to the authors. This is extremely important for the credibility of the journal, for as the journal is increasingly recognized as a source of scholarly work, it becomes relevant to the authors who gain academic credit through published works. Likewise, it is important for the credibility of the journal to recognize the bias of the author. Indeed, a recent study indicates that only 0.5% of 62,000 articles published in 1997 included information on the authors' research-related financial ties. In a separate study 2 years ago, of 800 scientific articles, 34% of the authors had conflicts of interest, but none of the authors declared them. In conclusion, the Editorial Board and I are committed to perform our primary scientific goal, which is to promulgate the science of risk stratification, i.e., the relationship between clinical studies that focus on outcomes and the specific way in which, as life insurance medical directors, we calculate mortality ratios from the expected and observed death rates of specific populations as we publish original material in the journal. We want to build an authoritative reference work for the life insurance industry, and if this can be used by our clinical colleagues as they strive for benchmarks, so much the better.

We want to encourage the publication of scholarly work by our colleagues within the industry and stimulate publication of work from those with similar interests from outside the industry. To accomplish these goals, we believe that the first step is to develop a succinct business plan for the journal.

REFERENCES