

SCIENTIFIC PUBLISHING

Turmoil Threatens to Sink Canadian Journal

TORONTO—Canada's premier journal of medical science continues to implode in the wake of allegations of censorship by its publisher, the Canadian Medical Association (CMA). The 20 February firing of Editor John Hoey and Deputy Editor Anne Marie Todkill (*Science*, 3 March, p. 1226) has prompted the resignations of 14 of 19 board members and a succession of senior and intermediate *CMA Journal* editors, as well as calls for a boycott. Researchers fear the loss of an important outlet for Canadian science.

"The *CMAJ* no longer exists as we knew it," says Amir Attaran, an associate professor of health law at the University of Ottawa, who wants researchers and reviewers to boycott the journal unless CMA reinstates Hoey and Todkill or explains more fully why it dismissed them. "It would be sad if such action were to lead to the *CMAJ*'s demise, but it would still be preferable to accepting anything less than a fully free journal."

CMA officials say Hoey and Todkill were fired without notice because a "fresh approach" was required. But most observers believe it was the final step in a series of clashes over articles and editorials Hoey

published during his 10-year reign and his commissioning of an outside panel that last month issued a scathing report of CMA's behavior. Hoey has declined comment due to a confidentiality agreement he and other editors signed with the CMA last year.

The Ottawa-based journal is now under its third acting editor, and only three of nine section editors remain on staff. Noni MacDonald, a pediatrician and medical professor in Halifax, Nova Scotia, says she stepped in as editor after the CMA promised to investigate how the journal is managed and adopt guidelines employed by the *Journal of the American Medical Association* to protect editorial independence. MacDonald was a member of the journal's Oversight Committee, which departing editorial board members say failed to preserve the journal's editorial independence.

In the meantime, MacDonald warns, a boycott could be fatal. "What's the goal there?" she asks. "To kill the journal, so we have no voice for national research issues?"

CMAJ's influence has been rising, say scientists, according to both quantifiable measures such as impact factor and anecdotal

evidence. "Ten years ago, this journal was just another throwaway publication produced by the doctors' association," says Jacques Pepin, a microbiologist at the University of Sherbrooke in Quebec. "Under Hoey and Todkill, it has become an interesting journal for clinicians."

In August 2004, for example, *CMAJ* published Pepin's analysis of an outbreak of *Clostridium difficile* bacterial infections that had killed 200 patients in Quebec hospitals. Pepin says the paper alerted authorities in other countries about the difficulty of controlling the infection, which subsequently showed up in the United States. "For 18 months or so, the *CMAJ* was the only international journal with new research [on the outbreaks]," he says.

Retired Canadian Supreme Court judge Antonio Lamer is leading a review of governance issues at the journal. But Pepin and others are worried that their recommendations may not go far enough. "The CMA seems not to have carefully planned any of its actions," Pepin says. "We are worried the *CMAJ* may be headed back to throwaway status."

—PAUL WEBSTER

Paul Webster writes from Toronto, Canada.

RESEARCH MISCONDUCT

Seoul National University Dismisses Hwang

SEOUL—Seoul National University's (SNU's) disciplinary committee announced on 20 March that it would dismiss disgraced cloner Woo Suk Hwang, a professor at its Veterinary College, for his involvement in fabricating data. Six other professors and co-authors on the two papers on embryonic stem cell cloning, which were published in 2004 and 2005 and later retracted from *Science*, received lighter sentences.

At a press conference, Chang Ku Byun, dean of academic affairs, said dismissal is the harshest punishment the committee could impose. Hwang will be banned from working in a public position for 5 years after his dismissal and will receive only half of his retirement money.

According to Byun, Hwang said that he would take all responsibility for the fabrication because he was the leader of the cloning project. In particular, Hwang admitted to ordering a junior researcher to take photographs of two stem cell lines in the 2005 article so that it would look as if the team had created 11 customized stem cell lines.

The committee also suspended four other professors and cut the wages of two. Shin Yong Moon and Sung Keun Kang were both suspended for 3 months; Byung Cheon Lee and Curie Ahn were suspended for 2 months. They



Fired. SNU's disciplinary committee has dismissed Hwang for fabricating data.

all will receive one-third of their wages during the suspension period and are not eligible for promotions for an additional 18 months. Chang Gyu Lee and Sun Ha Baek will have their wages deducted by one-third for 1 month.

"The professors fundamentally went back on the values of integrity and honesty that should have been kept as an academic and professor of a national university," Byun said. He explained

that the committee imposed comparatively harsher punishment on Moon and Kang because Moon was a co-author of the 2004 paper and Kang was working in the same lab as Hwang and was deeply involved in the data manipulation. Lee and Baek were listed as co-authors but did not make any contributions to the paper, Byun added.

Meanwhile, the special investigative team of Seoul Central Prosecutors' Office said, also on 20 March, that the initial contamination of stem cells in January last year was not deliberate, as they had previously thought, but arose from "accidents" by the researchers. The prosecutors are still

investigating whether stem cells from Hwang's project were intentionally switched with those of MizMedi Hospital, which collaborated with Hwang on the research. The prosecutors, who are also examining how Hwang spent state funds and private donations, hope to conclude their investigations early next month.

—YVETTE WOHN

Yvette Wohn is a reporter in Seoul.