

Journalism and the Sanctity of Science

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Nine. That is the number of dental publications that arrived on my desk the first two days of this week. The variety of these publications is as noteworthy as the volume: three association journals, including this one, and another with *two* supplements; a popular publication featuring a reprinting of online discussions or “threads,” and a tabloid-style esthetics “journal” so large that it served as a convenient folder to carry all the others home to their final destination (either the shelf or the city of Santa Monica recycling bin). The information contained therein is beyond the assimilation of all but the most freakishly gifted and bored readers. Now more than ever dentists must be selective in what they read.

The sheer existence of so many publications is a testament to the importance of the printed word in the dissemination of information within our profession. If a publication arrives on our desk, be certain that someone somewhere is reading it, even if we are not. The popularity of dental journalism is not new. Long before the days of dental mega-meetings, multimedia presentations, the DVD educational series, and online continuing education courses, scientific-based dental knowledge was primarily passed on through our journals.

It did not take long for manufacturers and others with a for-profit interest to recognize the potential for marketing their goods through our profession’s publications. The American College of Dentists recognized the adverse influence commercial interests were having on our professional scientific publications and felt the situation had reached a



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crisis. In response, the college conceived an organization known as the American Association of Dental Editors. The year was 1931. Seventy-six years later, many in our profession feel we are still facing a crisis with regard to commercialism in dental journalism.

We are a profession grounded in science; and, as such, we rely on evidence that has withstood the rigors of the scientific process in order to make clinical decisions. These decisions directly affect the health of our patients. When you connect the dots, the line between our profession’s journals and the oral health of the public is a short and direct one. Thus, the importance of the reliability of the information they contain cannot be overstated.

We accept that there are professional publications heavily tied to the dental industry. These are often extremely valuable to clinicians and enjoyable to read. There are times, however, when we demand to know that our information is completely unbiased.

We are disappointed when we look to a published article for reliable, unbiased scientific clinical information and we find that the study has been funded by a for-profit entity. We are not surprised when the study reaches a favorable conclusion about a product or technique that directly

benefits this entity. It is disturbing when we learn the author of the study has received some form of financial remuneration from the company in question. But what is even more disturbing is when these connections are not clear to us. This link between science and selling in our dental publications is often murky and difficult to dissect. Yes, when we discover this link it is disturbing. When we don’t, it can be outright dangerous.

As this issue of the *Journal* goes to press, the AADE is preparing for its annual meeting, which is held just prior to the American Dental Association Annual Session. The current president of the AADE is John O’Keefe, esteemed editor of the *Journal of the Canadian Dental Association*. During his presidency, he has devoted his efforts to addressing the issue of commercialism in dental journalism. It is our hope that at their meeting this year, the AADE will take concrete steps to curb the influence of commercialism in our scientific journals. Some have suggested a categorization of dental publications based on their relationship with commercial entities. This categorization would need to be clearly and prominently displayed to the readers in order for the publication to maintain AADE recognition status. The thought is that if the publication you are read-

ing carries the AADE logo on its inside cover, you will be able to find a statement identifying whether or not any of the published studies contained within are connected in any way to commercial interests. Those interested in the proceedings of this meeting or other activities of our organization of dental editors are welcome to visit www.dentaleditors.org.

Science and commercialism do not mix, and it is imperative the profession of dentistry continues to challenge those who seek to poison the sanctity of pure scientific knowledge with pursuit of profit. ■ ■ ■ ■

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