



Dr. John P. O'Keefe

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Finding the Right Balance

For an experimental period of 3 years, we are moving from publishing 11 to 10 issues of *JCDA* each year. As a result of this change, the current edition of *JCDA* combines the months of December 2005 and January 2006. Straddling the boundary between 2 years is symbolic of the many boundaries that we must straddle with *JCDA*.

This publication has to appeal to a broad spectrum of readers within the profession, including generalists and specialists, salaried dentists and private practitioners, CDA members and potential members alike. These groups all expect *JCDA* to be informative, educational and interesting. There is also the expectation that as a national publication we will project a positive image of Canadian dentistry and CDA beyond professional and geographic boundaries.

In contrast, publications whose primary concern is commercial have a narrower set of expectations placed upon them. They aim to satisfy the needs of private publishers by maximizing revenues. This singular goal can be achieved by following a fairly simple formula: disregard the peer-review process, publish articles that promote or endorse products, link editorial and advertising content and reprint articles that have been published elsewhere. The result is often product promotion dressed up in scientific clothing.

Mindful of how other publications operate, I commit to you that *JCDA* will always keep the interests of its readers first. While doing this, of course, we also wish to maintain excellent relationships with advertisers. It is clear that advertisers have an important role to play by conveying valuable information to readers. You cannot practise dentistry, decide which continuing education programs to attend or determine which products to purchase without finding out about the available offerings. How do we achieve

this fine balance between the needs of readers and advertisers?

We do so by dealing fairly with potential advertisers, by maintaining certain reasonable standards, by reviewing proposed advertisements and by explicitly declaring any relationships between authors and commercial sponsors. Advertisers are asked to provide evidence to support scientifically based claims or claims of superiority for their products or services. Given its nature, advertising copy will not often be underpinned with evidence that meets the most stringent criteria applied by adherents of evidence-based health care. Conscious of this reality, the suitability of an advertisement is usually determined in consultation with others while ensuring that our inclusion criteria are neither too high nor too low.

I have confidence in the intelligence of our readers and trust they can make their own judgments about claims made in the articles and advertisements published in *JCDA*. Our goal is to do everything reasonable in our power to ensure that readers are not deliberately misled. For instance, it is important to understand that CDA does not endorse any product or service advertised in the publication or in its delivery bag. I have heard some readers claim that when an advertisement for a continuing education course appears in our publication, the Association is somehow legitimizing the content of this course.

We are in no position to make legitimizing judgments about the contents of any advertised course. The primary criterion used in determining acceptability is whether the providers have been given the ADA CERP or AGD PACE stamp of approval. I feel that we can't go much further than this in order to be fair to our readers and our advertisers. I realize that in taking this stance certain groups will not be pleased, yet I promise that no mischief is intended.

I firmly believe that *JCDA* readers are the true arbiters of deciding whether we are maintaining the right balance, so please never hesitate to contact me with your views and suggestions.

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