



Dr. John P. O'Keefe

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## Paying the Bills But Staying Straight

Dr. Don Mulcahy raises an important subject in his letter to the editor (page 465). He asks if *JCDA* is too cozy with advertisers these days and expresses concerns that getting too comfortable in our relationships with industry will do the profession a disservice. From other correspondence I have recently received, I can understand how these concerns may be on the rise as we have worked hard to be more appealing to readers and attract more advertising revenues.

Our readers consistently tell us they want us to publish more clinical articles that are pertinent to everyday clinical practice and we are committed to addressing that need. Because so much in dental practice revolves around the use of materials, devices and equipment, manufacturers and distributors are particularly interested in advertising in publications that show their products in a favourable light. The challenge we constantly face is to separate responsibilities for managing editorial content and for soliciting advertising material.

An editor-in-chief of any small publication must juggle many responsibilities. My main role is to set the tone and direction of *JCDA*, which encompasses soliciting editorial content and ensuring that the quality of the material we publish sufficiently meets the needs of our readers. I also play an ambassadorial role for CDA, which brings me into frequent contact with significant players in the dental industry within Canada and beyond.

In meetings with industry representatives, I explain how *JCDA* is committed to providing readers with pertinent, accurate, concise and timely information in an attractive format. I also make it very clear that we do not tie advertising content to editorial content. I understand the perspective of potential advertisers. However, I reiterate that our readers are smart people and it

wouldn't take them very long to detect it if *JCDA* became a covert product-placement promotional vehicle. That is the role of commercial “throw-away” publications, and I learned years ago how many of them operate.

The penny dropped during a long conversation with a retired dental industry leader early in my time as editor-in-chief. I set out my lofty goals for the future of our publication and stated there would be a firewall between editorial and advertising content. He listened intently. When I finished presenting what I thought was a compelling case for advertising in *JCDA*, he paused for a couple of seconds and smiled knowingly.

He said, “John, your intentions are noble, but you will face an uphill battle. There are many deep ties between prominent authors on the circuit and industry. Money often changes hands behind the scenes to ensure that favourable messaging finds its way into publications.” He went on to tell me that during his time at work he had personally written cheques to authors or their foundations.

That was one of the most insightful conversations I have ever had in my current role. But, rather than throw in the towel, we have continued to publish only original material from authors to whom we pay no fee. *JCDA* has a peer review system that matches those of the best general medical journals. Is this model financially sustainable, especially at a time when new commercial publications are being launched? In my opinion, such a model, holding the needs of the profession front and centre, has to be sustained and sustainable.

My resolve to keep “battling uphill” for an excellent publication has been reinforced by my experience this year as president of the American Association of Dental Editors (AADE), where the issue of the increasing commercialization of dental publishing is currently of particular concern to members. Of course, there is no new problem under the sun! The AADE was founded in the 1930s to foster excellence in dental journalism at a time when the vast majority of publications were controlled by industry. Perhaps I am an idealist, but I remain convinced that there is a healthy middle ground in the field of dental publication where industry and the profession can work together in mutual respect and with full disclosure.

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