

Correspondence

Freedom of expression and editorial freedom – an open letter

Editorial freedom is a fundamental tenet of the Journal *Critical Care and Resuscitation*. We are the journal of the Australasian Academy of Critical Care Medicine and are not subject to the discretion of this or any other organization. We support freedom of expression and welcome controversial correspondence on any subject relevant to critical care medicine. We intend to publish all letters (subject to space, appeal, relevancy and libel legislation – as freedom allows one to be wrong, not to do wrong) in the desire to promote active and vigorous debate about all matters pertaining to Acute Medicine. Where letters refer to an earlier published paper, the authors will be offered right of reply.

Freedom of the press may appear to be a 'given' for any publication purporting to advance academic activities. At a meeting of the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors a statement supporting editorial freedom was prepared and promulgated.¹ However, there are examples where this freedom may be qualified.

Following the dismissal of George Lundberg as the editor-in-chief of JAMA by the executive of the American Medical Association (AMA), the editor of the *Lancet* commented that 'JAMA is no longer part of a free press'.² The editorial went on to comment about the politicised nature of the AMA, where since 1989, according to the *Chicago Tribune*, financial support of Republican Congressional candidates by the AMA political action committee has been twice that of the Democrat Congressional candidates.

The events that led to the dismissal of the editor-in-chief involved a JAMA press release commenting on an article on what type of activity a cohort of college students believed having 'sex' meant. The press release stated that the 'issue is of particular interest and debate now because of recent presidential statements'.

The reason for the dismissal? Apparently George Lundberg had 'threatened the historic tradition and integrity of JAMA by inappropriately and inexcusably interjecting into a major political debate that has nothing to do with science or medicine'.

In a prophetic twist, in 1988 when George Lundberg wrote an editorial in the JAMA discussing editorial freedom, he quoted Hugh Clegg (Quondam Editor, British Medical Journal) as saying "A medical editor has to be a keeper of the conscience of a profession; if he tries to live up to this ideal he will always be getting into trouble".³

Henry Mencken believed that "freedom of the press is limited to those who own one", a sentiment that has also been expressed by one of the *Lancet* readers,⁴ and perhaps from the recent JAMA (and not so recent *Irish Medical Journal*⁵) experience, this may be so. Nonetheless, as a statement from an enthusiastic group of journalistic novices we hold high the principle of freedom of expression and editorial freedom. Without it, thought and ideas are stifled, discussion sterile and unimaginative, and the report of little consequence.

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