

Medical writers threaten boycott of CMA journal
Authors want editors' dismissals explained
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TORONTO -- Authors of a popular series of articles published in the Canadian Medical Association Journal have threatened to withhold pending instalments unless the journal's owners clarify why the CMAJ's editor and senior deputy editor were fired.

Dr. John Hoey and his senior deputy, Anne Marie Todkill, were dismissed Feb. 20 in what the journal's owner, the Canadian Medical Association, has described as a need to revitalize the editorial leadership but which critics say was the result of a battle over editorial independence.

"Unfortunately, our confidence in the CMAJ as a journal that ensures editorial autonomy has been shaken," Dr. Gordon Guyatt of McMaster University said in a letter to CMA president Dr. Ruth Collins-Nakai and acting journal editor Dr. Noni MacDonald on behalf of the group of authors.

"Unless it is restored, we feel we cannot submit the new set of articles to the CMAJ, and will be compelled to submit elsewhere. Restoring our confidence will require an honest, straightforward explanation for the firing of Drs. Hoey and Todkill."

Attempts to reach Dr. Collins-Nakai and Dr. MacDonald for comment were unsuccessful yesterday.

Dr. Guyatt and 11 colleagues -- leading academic physicians from Canada and the United States -- have been working on a second series of articles on evidence-based medicine. The first batch of five articles, published in 2004 and 2005, were among the most popular downloads from the journal's on-line archive, they noted.

The series was designed to help clinicians interpret and put into practice emerging medical evidence published in peer-reviewed journals. The version in the print edition of the journal was aimed at practising doctors while an on-line version was aimed at those teaching in medical schools.

Dr. Peter Wyer, of Columbia University Medical Center in New York, said the

aim of the series was to make doctors "evidence literate . . . so they can read and understand what's being reported," he said from Westchester, N.Y.

Dr. Wyer said the group is not comfortable submitting new work to the journal at this point.

"We're very troubled by the situation there. And if it came down to a choice between publishing in a journal that lacked independence, I think we all agree that that is just not acceptable. It would neither be good for the series nor ultimately the journal."

Critics of the firings have argued that under Drs. Hoey and Todkill, the journal's impact factor -- an industry measure of its importance -- soared.

And just last week it was announced the journal had received its second nomination for a Michener Award for public service journalism for an article on the way pharmacists were handling sales of the emergency contraceptive Plan B.