



Submission to the Department of Canadian Heritage

in response to the consultation on the redesign of the Canada Magazine Fund and the Publications Assistance Program, and regarding the eligibility of peer-reviewed medical journals for the proposed Canadian Periodicals Fund

Periodical Publishing Policy
Department of Canadian Heritage
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Gatineau, Quebec K1A 0M5

Thank you very much for this opportunity to participate in the design of the proposed new Canadian Periodicals Fund.

We believe and respectfully submit that peer-reviewed medical journals fit perfectly with Heritage Canada's mission to support Canadian cultural products.

However, the need for support has now become critical.

We urgently request the assistance of Canadian Heritage to make it possible for peer-reviewed medical journals to continue in their vital roles of informing physicians, serving patients and maintaining the Canadian identity of our health care system.

Members of our Association are ready at any time to provide further information. Please contact any of the following:

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Canadian Medical Association
Canadian Neurological Sciences Federation
Canadian Psychiatric Association
The College of Family Physicians of Canada
Fédération des médecins omnipraticiens du Québec
Federation of National Specialty Societies of Canada
Pulsus Group Inc.
Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada

Canadian Association of Peer-Reviewed Medical Journals

Presentation to Canadian Heritage regarding the new Canadian Periodicals Fund

Executive Summary

Who we are

- Peer-reviewed medical journals are published by not-for-profit medical Colleges, Societies and Associations as part of their social mandate to provide continuing medical education and inform physicians on research, new developments and evolving standards of care.
- There are 32 peer-reviewed medical journals in Canada. Total annual distribution of all journals combined is 3.8 million, or about one-fifth of the circulation of the popular consumer news magazine *Maclean's* (19 million copies per year).

What we do

- Journals are the most frequent and direct sources of medical information for physicians, and have an immediate impact on health outcomes for Canadians.
- Journals inform the Canadian media and provide both a Canadian source of health information and a Canadian perspective on our unique health care system.
- Journals provide a venue for publication of research performed in Canada by Canadians, and play a major role in keeping researchers in this country.

How we do it

- Journals are distributed to all physicians practising in each area of medicine by the Colleges, Societies and Associations because they have a responsibility to disseminate the latest information on patient care to all physicians.
- Third-party studies of readership report that over 95% of Canadian physicians use peer-reviewed medical journals, and that every issue of every journal is read by over 50% of physicians in their target audiences.
- Physicians typically read six to 10 journals regularly, and expect to receive them as part of their continuing medical education.

Why we need assistance

- Medical publishing in Canada is in crisis as the decade-long decline in pharmaceutical advertising accelerates, partly due to increased direct-to-consumer advertising and partly due to regulatory changes.
- Our costs, particularly for mailing, continue to rise.
- Our non-peer-reviewed competitors have already been hard hit: in the last year, the largest medical publication, *The Medical Post*, has reduced its frequency from 44 per year to 32, as has the largest French-language publication, *L'actualité médicale*. *Stitches* and *Patient Care*, both formerly in the top 10, have ceased publishing.
- Split runs are a reality in medical publishing, and Canada's journals are competing for readers and advertisers with print and electronic versions of American journals.
- If journals are further reduced in size or forced to close, Canadian physicians will have to rely on foreign publications and the Canadian perspective on health and health care will be lost to physicians, patients and the country as a whole.

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Importance of peer-reviewed journals to Canadian patients

Whether in urban centres with access to large teaching hospitals or in remote communities served by a handful of family physicians, Canadians expect their unique health care system to reflect the best that medical science can offer. They expect their physicians to provide them with treatment based on the most current standard of care and the latest research findings. They expect their physicians to be up-to-the-minute on new treatment options – as well as on new indications, new procedures, warnings and product recalls.

That is the essential role of Canada’s peer-reviewed medical journals:

- to disseminate the latest advances in the constantly evolving art and science of medicine to physicians across the country;
- to ensure that current best practices reach out as quickly as possible to every physician in every part of the country, and
- to ensure that every patient in every community has access to physicians who share the same up-to-date body of medical knowledge.

There is a remarkable immediacy to the impact of peer-reviewed medical journals on patient outcomes. Whether it is new findings on hormone replacement therapy or unexpected side-effects of a diabetes medication (to name two recent examples) an article in a peer-reviewed medical journal will change the way physicians treat their patients in every part of the country virtually overnight.

Peer-reviewed medical journals are the fastest, most responsive and most frequent sources of medical news and continuing education for Canada’s physicians. They quickly and efficiently transfer knowledge from researcher to physician, from physician to physician, and from physician to patient. They have a direct impact on outcomes for patients and ensure that patients in every part of the country have access to the best and most current standard of care.

Importance to Canadian consumers

Canadians receive a great deal of information about health care through the consumer media; but it is important to note how many of those stories on the nightly news begin with words like, “A new study published in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*...” or “New guidelines published in the *Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology of Canada*” or “According to an article in *Canadian Family Physician*.”

A search of the Canadian Press database of news stories for the keywords “medical journal” found 275 news stories¹ in the previous 365 days; most of these stories, many of which were picked up in multiple newspapers, television news programs and radio news shows, referred to articles, studies and research that first appeared in medical journals and were then transferred to the consumer sector by medical reporters.

Canada’s peer-reviewed medical journals inform the consumer media and provide both a Canadian source for health information and a Canadian perspective on our health care system.

Importance to Canadian research and researchers

Peer-reviewed medical journals provide a place for Canadian medical researchers and academics to publish their work, which puts Canadian research on the record around the world – and makes it possible for our researchers to work and publish in their own country.

Research without publication is pointless, and publication in non-peer-reviewed magazines is not acceptable in the scientific, medical and academic world. Canada’s peer-reviewed medical journals currently provide a world-class venue for Canadian authors and thus provide the vital final link in the chain of Canadian medical research and education.

Canada’s peer-reviewed medical journals, spotlighting Canadian medical authors, are currently leaders among the hundreds of journals published around the world; the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* is in the top six general medicine journals² in the world in terms of “impact factor,” a measure of how often a journal’s content is cited in the world’s other peer-reviewed journals; *Canadian Family Physician* is in the top six³ world journals of family medicine; every Canadian peer-reviewed journal enjoys international recognition in its field.

¹ See Appendix 1. Canadian Press search results “medical journal” February 20, 2008.

² Thomson Scientific, Journal Citation Reports, 2006 JCR Science Edition.

³ Ibid.

Articles published in Canadian peer-reviewed medical journals are available to, and frequently cited by, leading medical journals around the world, giving Canadian researchers and authors a prominent place on the international stage.

The ability to be published in world-class Canadian journals plays a significant role in keeping leading researchers and authors at Canadian hospitals, universities and research institutions where they can pursue their careers as effectively as they could in the United States or abroad.

Importance to Canadian physicians

In an intensely competitive marketplace for readers, peer-reviewed medical journals enjoy an extraordinarily high degree of readership and support from the physicians who make up our audience. There are at least two objective measures of this:

- The highly detailed annual Medical Media Study⁴ conducted by the Print Measurement Bureau reveals that the peer-reviewed medical journals examined by the study enjoy extremely high readership among their respective physician audiences. Peer-reviewed journals are consistently read by more than 50% of their total potential audiences – and some by much more (*Paediatrics & Child Health*, for example, has 89% readership within its specialty).
- The 2007 National Physician Survey⁵ was the largest and most rigorous survey of Canadian physicians ever conducted. It was sponsored by the Canadian Medical Association, the College of Family Physicians of Canada and the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada, with methodological assistance from the Canadian Institute of Health Information (CIHI). The survey received a 31.6% response rate and analyzed completed questionnaires from 19,239 physicians. Asked to rate the effectiveness of various methods of continuing medical education, physicians reported the following:
 - 95.7% of Canadian physicians use peer-reviewed medical journals;

⁴ PMB Medical Media Study, 2007. PMB Print Measurement Bureau, Toronto. See pertinent sections Appendix 2.

⁵ National Physician Survey, 2007. www.nationalphysiciansurvey.ca, accessed February, 2008. See pertinent section, attached as Appendix 3.

- 80.1% consider Canada’s peer-reviewed medical journals Good, Very Good, or Excellent;
- Only 4.3% reported that they do not use peer-reviewed medical journals.

What “peer-review” means

There are many medical publications, but only a few peer-reviewed journals. Peer review means that a high level of academic rigour and well established standards are applied to the selection, review and preparation of articles. It is the gold standard for scientific and medical publishing, and is a requirement for research to be considered legitimate and to join the international body of medical literature.

Each peer-reviewed article must be read, analyzed and carefully considered by three (and sometimes five or more) fully qualified physicians before it can be published. In addition, peer-reviewed articles must meet many other strict requirements, including the following:

- Articles must meet the ethical standards set by the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE).
- Manuscripts must follow the “Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals” from ICMJE.
- Studies involving patients must be registered in a registry of medical studies.
- Studies involving humans must have ethics board approval.
- Authors must state their affiliations and reveal all competing interests.

Peer-reviewed journals are bona fide publications

At least two characteristics (in addition to high readership, see above) demonstrate that peer-reviewed journals are bona fide publications distinct from “association publications,” “magalogues,” and free-distribution commercial magazines: editorial independence and third-party advertising.

- Editorial independence: The principles of academic integrity and editorial independence are a fundamental element of all peer-reviewed medical journals. Many, such as the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* and *Canadian Family Physician*, have detailed policies⁶ establishing editorial independence, separating

⁶ See College of Family Physicians of Canada policy on editorial independence, attached as Appendix 4.

editorial content from commercial influence, and requiring strict adherence to the internationally accepted rules of academic integrity. Peer-reviewed journals are about medicine – not the activities or interests of the parent organizations. Content is chosen by medical editors and editorial advisory boards consisting of practising physicians and academics.

- Third-party advertising: All of the peer-reviewed medical journals carry paid, third-party advertising. Much of this comes from the pharmaceutical industry, but the financial sector, governments, health promotion agencies and others are well represented. In addition, many journals carry extensive recruitment classified advertising.

Our circulation model

Peer-reviewed medical journals face a unique circulation challenge: they are required by their social mandates to reach every practising physician within their respective specialties or areas in Canada.

It is part of the core mandate and responsibility of the Colleges, Societies and Associations to provide the latest information and continuing education to all physicians across the country. Peer-reviewed medical journals are therefore distributed to all practising physicians in each journal's specialty area (and beyond) in order to ensure comprehensive and timely dissemination of information.

The reader profile for peer-reviewed journals typically consists of three groups (though the proportions vary from one journal to another):

- members of the College, Society or Association dedicated to the area of medicine in question;
- non-member physicians in the same field of practice; and,
- non-member physicians in other fields whose practices cross over the specialty lines. (Many family physicians and general practitioners, for example, receive journals related to obstetrics and gynecology, or psychiatry, or rural medicine, or other areas relevant to their patients.)

Canadian physicians typically read between six and 10 journals on a regular basis.

Canadian physicians accept and expect that they will receive the latest journals from the respective Colleges, Societies and Associations; they have, in every case, the option to request not to receive a given journal. (For example, not counting requests

to cancel duplicate copies to the same address, *Canadian Family Physician* has a current “drop list”⁷ of 271 family physicians who have requested not to receive the journal.) However, members of the Colleges, Societies and Associations do not have the choice to opt out of the social mandates of these organizations, which in every case includes dissemination of information to physicians so that all Canadian patients will be treated by physicians who are fully up to date on the latest standards of care.

The circulation of peer-reviewed medical journals in Canada is currently supported by advertising revenue and membership dues. At some journals, the shortfall between revenue and expenses of publishing are simply covered out of general revenue (ie, membership dues) as part of the sponsoring organization’s mandate.

At several peer-reviewed journals, a portion of membership dues is specifically allocated to a journal subscription in a paid circulation model referred to as “non-refundable membership benefit,” of which all members are apprised annually. This model is recognized as paid circulation by the Canadian Circulation Audit Bureau and reported as such on the audited circulation statements.⁸

Total circulation⁹ of all peer-reviewed journals combined is approximately 3.8 million copies per year; by way of perspective, this is approximately one-fifth of the total circulation per year of the popular consumer news magazine, *Maclean’s*.¹⁰

Why we need assistance

The financial model to support the high costs of publishing peer-reviewed medical journals has come under great stress in the last decade, with continually declining advertising revenue, intense competition from non-peer-reviewed commercial publications and steadily rising costs.

Every journal operates on an advertising/editorial ratio – less advertising means less space for editorial content. Many journals attempt to maintain a 50:50 ratio, with one ad page contributing to the cost of one editorial page (although some use a

⁷ College of Family Physicians of Canada; CFP drop list, accessed March 2008.

⁸ Canadian Circulation Audit Bureau (CCAB) business publication audit reports. See Appendix 5.

⁹ See journals list, attached as Appendix 7.

¹⁰ Canadian Advertising Rates and Data (CARDonline) accessed March, 2008.

67:33 editorial to advertising ratio). With declining ad pages, the peer-reviewed medical journals have no choice but to cut back on editorial content.

Without support from the Department of Canadian Heritage, particularly toward the heavy and steadily rising costs of distribution, it is safe to say that peer-reviewed medical journals will publish fewer articles in the future, and that some journals will not survive.

This is not a hypothetical concern: in the 12 months preceding this submission, two non-peer-reviewed medical publications (*Stitches* and *Patient Care*), which relied on the same advertising market and which faced the same mailing costs as peer-reviewed journals, ceased publication. In addition, three other non-peer-reviewed medical publications greatly reduced their frequency: *National Review of Medicine* changed from 24 issues per year to 12, the *Medical Post* went from 44 to 32, as did *L'actualité médicale*, the largest French-language medical publication. All five of these publications were among the top 10 medical publications in Canada in terms of advertising and circulation; their difficulties demonstrate the reality of the threat to medical publishing in general, and the peer-reviewed journals in particular.

The challenges facing Canada's peer-reviewed medical journals

- Few, if any, of Canada's peer-reviewed medical journals are currently "profitable" or able to return surpluses to their sponsoring organizations. Most have not done so for many years, and losses are growing. (Individual publications in the peer-reviewed group are prepared to confidentially share their audited financial statements with the Department of Canadian Heritage on request.)
- Print advertising in the medical publishing sector has fallen steadily since 2000. In that time, the number of ad pages¹¹ has declined by 15% and the total revenue from advertising has declined by over 20% as intense competition and other factors drive ad prices downward.
- A shift in the pharmaceutical marketing from journal advertising to direct-to-consumer advertising, driven largely by American ad campaigns and their often coordinated spill-over into Canada, is currently undercutting what was traditionally the largest single source of revenue for peer-reviewed journals.

¹¹ Advertising Analysis Report (AAR), Cegedim Dendrite. Reports 2000 – 2007.

- In late 2007 and so far in 2008, there has been a devastating decline in pharmaceutical advertising due to market conditions and recent regulatory changes from the Pharmaceutical Advertising Advisory Board and Health Canada. Total advertising in just December 2007 was down by 15% compared to 2006; the first quarter of 2008¹² is down by over 33%. If this trend continues, many peer-reviewed journals will be in jeopardy.
- Peer-reviewed medical journals compete for advertising revenue with a number of large, non-peer-reviewed commercial publications distributed free of charge to physicians. These publications do not share the high editorial costs faced by peer-reviewed journals since they typically do not have multiple physicians on staff, do not employ large staffs of editors, and do not engage in the rigorous process of peer review. Our commercial competitors enjoy the economies of scale that come from publishing many medical, consumer and other titles. They also do not share the social mandate of reaching all physicians in each specialty or membership area, and can thus tailor their circulation to target only those most attractive to advertisers.
- Postal rates have risen by an average of 5% each year since 2000 and now represent the second largest single expense after printing faced by the peer-reviewed medical journals.
- Costs relating to printing, postage, staff and many other elements have risen steadily since 2000. Staff cost in particular has increased by 25% to 35% at most journals. (This is partly related to the generally healthy economy, and partly to the difficulty of attracting and keeping the highly specialized staff required.)
- Peer-reviewed medical journals face the considerable cost of on-line publication, since a requirement of public funding for research is that the results be published on-line in a free, open access, peer-reviewed journal within six months of print publication. These extensive websites attract a small amount of advertising revenue, but are barred by Health Canada regulations from carrying the same pharmaceutical ads as appear in the journals due to a prohibition on this type of direct-to-consumer advertising.

¹² Ibid. Report January 2008. See Appendix 6.

The reality of “split run” competition

Canada’s peer-reviewed journals face a real and present threat from split runs of American competitors. While the threat of split runs following the North American Free Trade Agreement never materialized for most Canadian publications, the peer-reviewed journals currently find themselves in competition with a Canadian edition of the pre-eminent medical publication from the United States: *The New England Journal of Medicine, Canadian edition*. With the prestige of its name and the huge advantage of essentially no-cost editorial from the U.S. edition, this journal is now the second-largest peer-reviewed medical journal in Canada in terms of total advertising revenue.¹³

The *Journal of the American Medical Association* currently publishes a full French-language edition¹⁴ in electronic format.

Many specialty publications in the United States already enjoy considerable Canadian readership; there is no good reason to suppose that they will not follow the successful example set for them by *The New England Journal of Medicine*, with either print or electronic versions aimed at readers in Canada.

Peer-reviewed journals published outside of Canada in print or electronic formats are clinically well regarded; however, they do not provide either a Canadian perspective or a venue for Canadian authors.

Serving physicians in both official languages

Approximately 25% of Canada’s physicians practise primarily in French;¹⁵ as well, a majority of francophone physicians report that they also access the medical literature in English. Canada’s peer-reviewed medical journals reflect the language preferences of our member groups and physician populations.

- *Le Médecin du Québec*, published by the Fédération de médecins omnipraticien du Québec, is the pre-eminent medical publication in Quebec; the majority of its content is in French.

¹³ Ibid. AAR Report 2007.

¹⁴ JAMA-français, available at <http://jamafr.ama-assn.org/> (accessed February 25, 2008).

¹⁵ Ibid. National Physician Survey.

- *Les Sélections de Médecine/Sciences* is French language.
- In addition to *CMAJ*, the Canadian Medical Association publishes several journals, including *Canadian Journal of Emergency Medicine/Journal canadien de médecine d'urgence* and the *Canadian Journal of Rural Medicine/Journal canadien de médecine rurale*, with bilingual content.
- *Canadian Family Physician/Le Médecin de famille Canadien*, published by the College of Family Physicians of Canada, publishes in French all articles submitted in French and provides translations of all research abstracts and key points.

Canadian content

Canada's peer-reviewed medical journals are by definition Canadian. All are owned, managed, produced, laid out, printed and distributed in Canada by Canadians. Editorial content is chosen, peer-reviewed and edited in Canada by Canadians.

Authorship of articles is overwhelmingly Canadian and our journals have no difficulty meeting the 80% standard set by the Department of Canadian Heritage.

Who we are

Canada's peer-reviewed medical journals are classed as academic publications by the Department of Canadian Heritage. Peer-reviewed medical journals are distinguished from the other 44 Canadian medical publications aimed at doctors¹⁶ by a) the scientific rigour of peer review and, b) their core mission of informing physicians, which is part of the social mandate of each of the Colleges, Societies and Associations that publish journals and, c) their paid membership.

Members of the Association include the following:

- Canadian Medical Association,
- Canadian Neurological Sciences Federation,
- Canadian Psychiatric Association,
- College of Family Physicians of Canada,
- Fédération des médecins omnipraticiens du Québec,
- Federation of National Specialty Societies of Canada,

¹⁶ Canadian Advertising Rates and Data, Cardonline accessed March, 2008.

- Pulsus Group Inc., and
- Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada.

Together, these medical organizations publish 32 peer-reviewed medical journals¹⁷ reaching essentially all physicians in all types of practice, in both official languages, in all parts of Canada.

Conclusion

Canada's peer-reviewed medical journals

- represent a vital segment of the publishing sector;
- form a key part of the health care system providing information to physicians that has immediate impact on patient care and health outcomes for Canadians;
- provide a venue for Canadian publication of research and education, thus supporting Canadian research and keeping researchers at home;
- inform the consumer media on Canadian health care issues; and,
- provide a Canadian context and perspective on a unique health care system that forms an integral part of this country's social and cultural experience.

Canada's peer-reviewed medical publishing sector is currently under siege from rising costs, declining advertising revenue and the real and present threat of American competition.

It is the considered view and respectfully submitted position of the members of the Canadian Association of Peer-Reviewed Medical Journals that any publicly funded program designed to protect, promote and enhance Canadian cultural products must place peer-reviewed medical journals near the top of the list of publications requiring and deserving support.

We urgently request the assistance of Canadian Heritage to make it possible for peer-reviewed medical journals to continue in their vital role of informing physicians, serving patients and maintaining the Canadian identity of our health care system.

(end)

¹⁷ See list attached as Appendix 7.