



EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE

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The reputation and integrity of a scientific journal depends to a degree on the perception of its editorial independence. The North American Actuarial Journal (NAAJ) is no exception. Without compromising in this area, the NAAJ has developed a reputation of accomplishing its mission of “scientifically addressing the domestic and international problems, interests and concerns of actuaries, their customers and public policy decision-makers.”

While editorial autonomy is an important part of many publications, the day-to-day realities of running a publishing operation sometimes add shades of gray to this concept. A simple example might involve a small-town newspaper that depends on a small number of large advertisers to maintain its solvency. Such a newspaper may be influenced by the advertising revenues that it receives as it considers publishing a non-complimentary article or editorial about one of its large advertisers. In this example, editorial independence may be weighed against the future solvency of the newspaper in determining the course of action.

A recent event within the scientific journal community occurred that has brought this topic to center-stage. As reported in an editorial in the Canadian Medical Association Journal (CMAJ), the editorial independence of the journal was allegedly compromised when a Canadian Medical Association executive objected strenuously to a news article that was being prepared for publication in the CMAJ. The objection was made in response to a complaint from the Canadian Pharmacists Association. The objection was conveyed to the CMAJ editors who had to choose between pulling the entire story or getting most of it out by publishing a “negotiated revision.” The editors opted for the latter choice.

Why did I feel it important to bring this topic to the attention of the readers of the NAAJ? Do I think that we are struggling with editorial independence with the NAAJ?

Let me make my view perfectly clear that I do not question the editorial independence of the NAAJ. The Society of Actuaries (SOA) has developed a high quality refereed scientific journal and is very proud of this accomplishment. However, as the NAAJ strives to attain its objectives, it may address some controversial issues. In the absence of a commitment to editorial independence, the reputation and credibility of the NAAJ may be questioned. On the other hand, editorial independence will add strength and membership value to a journal that scientifically addresses these problems, interests and concerns.

The SOA has delegated responsibility to the NAAJ editors to review and referee manuscripts and to invite editorials and commentaries at the discretion of the editors with no interference from the SOA. Again, the reader may ask if there is a problem that is in need of addressing, which has spurred my comments herein. Once again, I must answer with a resounding “No.” However, it is important that the readership be aware of this topic and why it is so important that we live by these standards.

As a past Director of Publications for the SOA, I heartily applaud the work of the NAAJ editorial board. Further, I have had the utmost respect for and confidence in the NAAJ editors that I have worked with. As the NAAJ enters its second decade of service to the actuarial profession, I am confident it will continue to meet these important objectives and further its status as a premier actuarial journal.