Editorial Governance of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*

A Report

Roger N. Rosenberg, MD
E. Ratcliffe Anderson, Jr, MD

The *Journal of the American Medical Association* has enjoyed an illustrious 116-year history as a peer-reviewed medical journal dedicated to the science and art of medicine and the betterment of the public health.

When George D. Lundberg, MD, editor of *JAMA*, was removed from his position on January 15, 1999, there was concern within the medical and scientific publishing communities that his dismissal was a challenge to *JAMA*’s editorial freedom and integrity.

To reaffirm the American Medical Association’s (AMA’s) commitment to the integrity of *THE JOURNAL*, to maintain *JAMA*’s editorial independence, and to assist in selecting a new editor, the AMA assembled a search committee and announced its members on January 27, 1999. The committee is chaired by Roger N. Rosenberg, MD, Zale Distinguished Chair in Neurology and professor of neurology at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas and editor of the *Archives of Neurology*.

Other distinguished members of the search committee are: Floyd E. Bloom, MD, editor-in-chief of *Science* and chair of the Department of Neuropharmacology, Scripps Research Institute; William H. Danforth, MD, chair of the Board of Trustees, Washington University; Bernadine Healy, MD, former head of the National Institutes of Health and dean of the College of Medicine and Public Health, The Ohio State University; Michael M. E. Johns, MD, PhD, dean of the Harvard Faculty of Medicine; Edmund D. Pellegrino, MD, director of the Center for Clinical Bioethics, Georgetown University Medical Center; and John E. Wennberg, MD, MPH, director of the Center for the Evaluative Clinical Sciences and Peggy Y. Thomson Professor for the Evaluative Clinical Sciences, Dartmouth Medical School.

The selection of the search committee was a collaborative effort involving senior members of the *JAMA* editorial staff, editors of the various *Archives* Journals published by the AMA, and AMA senior staff. The committee’s charge is 3-fold: (1) To recruit an editor for *JAMA*. This includes reviewing the detailed job description and the editor’s reporting relationships. (2) To review existing practices and develop safeguards that will guarantee *JAMA*’s integrity, editorial independence, and responsibility. (3) To determine how the editor’s performance can best be measured. The committee decided its first charge should be the thorough examination of the editorial governance of *JAMA*. As we stated the day the search committee was announced: “Our committee will be particularly concerned with developing mechanisms that provide complete safeguards to ensure editorial independence for the new *JAMA* editor.”

During the past 4 months, the committee has met and discussed what safeguards should be proposed to the AMA to ensure editorial independence, while also preserving the AMA’s responsibilities as publisher. The committee has solicited input from a number of groups, including leading medical journal personnel and medical journal editors and publishers.

What follows is an agreement among the search committee, the AMA’s Board of Trustees, and key AMA senior staff on the governance of *JAMA*. It is the result of a number of meetings, negotiations, and compromises in order to best serve *THE JOURNAL*, its mission, AMA members, and all *JAMA* readers.

On behalf of the AMA, its Board, officers, members, and staff, it is a pleasure to have reached this milestone agreement. Working cooperatively with the search committee, we have found an embodiment of our common goal of ed-

Author Affiliations: Dr Rosenberg is Chair of the *JAMA* Editor Search Committee, editor of *Archives of Neurology*, and Zale Distinguished Chair in Neurology and professor of neurology at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas; and Dr Anderson is executive vice president and CEO of the American Medical Association, Chicago, Ill.

Corresponding Author and Reprints: Roger N. Rosenberg, MD, Department of Neurology, University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center, 5323 Hines Blvd, Dallas, TX 75235-9108 (e-mail: rrosen@mednet.swmed.edu).
Editorial independence and journalistic responsibility that can set the standard for medical journals into the next millennium. This is truly a historic day for the AMA and its family of scientific journals.

We believe it is now time to move forward. The next mission for the committee is to begin a search for a new editor. As we had announced at the beginning of this process, we continue to be “committed to a rigorous and comprehensive international search for an outstanding physician-scientist with a strong academic background and considerable experience in the editorial process and medical publishing.”

Editorial Governance for JAMA

Working cooperatively over the last 4 months, the JAMA Editor Search Committee and the senior staff of the AMA have engaged in a productive dialogue and process to arrive at the best governance alternatives for the Journal of the American Medical Association and the Archives Journals. The purpose of this effort has been to insure editorial freedom and independence for JAMA, the Archives Journals, and their Editor-in-Chief. Editorial independence and journalistic responsibility continue to be hallmarks of the publications of the AMA, and insuring that valued tradition into the next millennium is of utmost importance.

Editorial Governance Plan for JAMA

1. There will be a seven (7) member Journal Oversight Committee (JOC). This committee will function and be recognized not only as a system to evaluate the Editor-in-Chief but also as a buffer between the Editor-in-Chief and AMA management and a system to foster objective consideration of the inevitable issues that arise between a journal and its parent body.

2. The JOC will prepare an annual evaluation of the Editor-in-Chief, which will be reported to the AMA executive vice president (EVP) and to the Board of Trustees of the AMA. The Committee will have the charge to evaluate the performance of the Editor-in-Chief on the basis of objective criteria, and deliver that evaluation on an annual basis to the EVP and Board of Trustees of the AMA. The JOC will be responsible for determining the criteria for evaluation of the Editor-in-Chief. These criteria will be established in writing and made available to each member of the JOC, the JAMA Editorial Board, the Editor-in-Chief, and the EVP and approved by the Board of Trustees of the AMA. The JAMA Editorial Board will be solicited for input to the evaluation process by the Committee. Correspondence about the performance of the Editor or JAMA received from constituent groups will be shared with the Committee. The Editor-in-Chief will be offered a 5-year contract. If the Editor-in-Chief is dismissed during the term of the employment contract, other than for cause, the contract will be paid in full. Should such dismissal occur in year 5 of the contract, the minimum payment to the Editor-in-Chief shall be 12 months’ salary.

3. The JOC will be charged, in addition, with reviewing and, if necessary, making additional recommendations to the AMA EVP and Board concerning governance and structural reforms necessary to ensure the AMA Journals’ editorial independence. For this purpose the Editor-in-Chief and VP for Publishing will serve as advisors to the committee. This function will be ongoing.

4. The seven members of the JOC will include one member of AMA senior management, one member from outside the AMA with publishing business experience, and 5 members representing the scientific, editorial, peer-reviewer, con-

“...The new editor will be expected to lead JAMA into the 21st century and to provide the clinical and scientific acumen and vision needed to maintain JAMA’s high standard of excellence.”

With this governance report in hand, we must now help find the best person for the job to become JAMA’s 15th editor since The Journal began publishing in 1883.

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tributor, and medical communities. The Committee members shall serve 3-year staggered terms. A Committee member may serve no more than 2 terms.

5. No member of the JOC may be an AMA employee except for the member from AMA Senior Management. No AMA employee may be Chair of the committee, who shall be elected by the JOC.

6. Nominations for the first set of JOC members will be forwarded to the AMA Board by the Editor Search Committee which will also recommend the initial term of each member.

7. JOC members are to be selected by the AMA Board only from a list of recommended persons submitted by the JOC. Three names per position will be recommended by the JOC. In the event that the Board selects none of the 3, additional names would be recommended by the JOC, as necessary. Members of the JOC can only be appointed or removed by a 2/3 supermajority vote of the AMA Board of Trustees in the exercise of its oversight function.

8. Any proposal to dismiss the Editor-in-Chief for any reason shall be brought before the JOC for evaluation and a formal vote. The recommendations and views of the JOC shall be presented to the AMA Board along with the recommendation and views of the EVP. A supermajority (2/3) vote of the AMA Board would be required for dismissal of the Editor-in-Chief.

9. The Editor-in-Chief will continue to report to the Sr Vice President for Publishing and Business Services only for business and financial operations. The Editor-in-Chief will not report to management for any aspect of the editorial content of JAMA or the Archives Journals or other AMA publications under his/her jurisdiction. Editorial independence of the Editor-in-Chief will be absolutely protected and respected by AMA management. In order to exercise its evaluative functions, the JOC will have full access to financial information including revenue and expense statements, budgets, and actual results. In order to have access to this proprietary information each member of the JOC who receives it will execute the AMA’s standard Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest Agreements.

10. The Editor-in-Chief will have total responsibility for the editorial content of JAMA and responsibility for the performance of the Archives Editors and other AMA publications under his/her jurisdiction. AMA management recognizes and fully accepts the necessity of editorial independence for the Editor-in-Chief at all times.
Signatories of the Editorial Governance Plan include the following:

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