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## Canadian Medical Association Journal

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For forms of government  
let fools contest;  
Whate'er is best administer'd is best.<sup>1</sup>

Machiavelli describes a despotic prince who, to bring order to a new territory, established a local government in which absolute authority was devolved on a minister. The minister was cruel but efficient and, despite the resentment of the people, quickly established peace. Once this objective had been met the prince dissociated himself from the unpopular minister by having "his corpse laid out in two pieces, with a chopping board and a bloody knife beside it." By this means, the prince succeeded in consolidating his rule, for the "ferocious sight made the people . . . simultaneously happy and dumb-founded."<sup>2</sup>



Gone are the days of premiers and ministers cutting ribbons to open hospitals and clinics. Closing a hospital is not nearly as much fun as opening it. Across the nation, governments are shamelessly divesting themselves of the management of health care. Or are they? Jonathan Lomas and associates begin a 4-part series examining the transfer of responsibility from provincial governments to local health authorities. The series explores the nature of decentralization in Canadian health care. Drawing upon the results of an extensive survey, it describes the extent of devolution and the experiences of regional health planning boards and committees. This is a huge experi-

ment in government. Let's hope that it leads to better administration of our health care system.

Most medical journals carry pharmaceutical advertising. Without it, they would have to charge huge subscription fees. Nonetheless, such advertising must be monitored, and journals such as *CMAJ* that endorse the "Uniform requirements" must "consider for publication all criticisms of advertisements."<sup>3</sup> Joel Lexchin (page 351) reviews controls on pharmaceutical advertising in Canada and elsewhere and suggests how such controls could be strengthened. In accompanying editorials, Jean Desjardins (page 363) responds positively to Lexchin's suggestions, and Martin Shapiro (page 359) takes a slightly more pessimistic view of our ability to keep the power and influence of drug companies in check.

Lastly, Maria Hugi writes with power and intimacy of her experience with breast cancer (page 397). If ever I am faced with such a trial I hope I have even a small portion of her ability to confront the unknown. — JH

## References

1. Pope A. *An essay on man*. London, 1733–1734: epistle 2, lines 303–4.
2. Machiavelli N. *The prince* Wootton D, translator. Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1995:24–5.
3. International Committee of Medical Journal Editors. *Uniform requirements for manuscripts submitted to biomedical journals*. Philadelphia: American College of Physicians, 1997.