



Signed consent for publication

The recent editorial by Dr. John Hoey,¹ which described the need to obtain written consent from patients before publishing details about their cases, means that it may become difficult for our colleagues in psychiatry to report interesting cases. This is particularly true when the patients involved have Munchausen's syndrome.^{2,3}

For instance, careful review of complete office and hospital records is very important in light of a recently reported case of the syndrome in which a patient altered electronic medical records in his quest for experimental therapy.⁴ The journal involved described this as "electronic cancer Munchausen syndrome." Case reports like this help alert colleagues about potential problems, but it will be almost impossible to obtain signed consent for publication from these patients, who fall into a grey area.

I agree with the policy on patient consent as described by Hoey, but I caution the Editorial Board not to swing the pendulum too far because of

this single unfortunate incident. Many grey areas have to be eliminated first.

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References

1. Hoey J. Patient consent for publication — an apology. *CMAJ* 1998;159(5):503-4.
2. Baker CE, Major E. Munchausen's syndrome. A case presenting as asthma requiring ventilation. *Anaesthesia* 1994; 49(12):1050-1.
3. Ballas SK. Factitious sickle cell acute painful episodes: a secondary type of Munchausen syndrome. *Am J Hematol* 1996; 53(4):254-8.
4. Hadeed V, Trump DL, Mies C. Electronic cancer Munchausen syndrome. *Ann Intern Med* 1998;129(1):73.

Those CMAJ interviews

In a format reminiscent of that found in high school yearbooks of the '50s and lately, and rather incongruously, in *The Lancet*, you are now including in your News and Analysis

section rather facile interviews with eminent persons. This highly irritating feature always concludes with an apparently fundamental question about the particulars of the car the individual drives. Does this have scientific import? Am I missing something? Don't you risk embarrassing subjects if they happen to ride a bicycle?

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[The news and features editor responds:]

I pondered this as I drove to work in my 1989 Honda Accord. These interviews have been far from facile — all have indicated why members of CMAJ's Editorial Board have pursued the careers they have. That in turn explains why they were chosen to be board members. Some of our questions have dealt with personal details to keep the interviews from reading like a rehash of members' CVs.

Patrick Sullivan

News and Features Editor
CMAJ

LOGIE MEDICAL ETHICS ESSAY CONTEST DEADLINE: JUNE 1, 1999

Once again, *CMAJ* is sponsoring the Logie Medical Ethics Essay Contest for undergraduate medical students attending Canadian universities. The awards this year are \$1500 for the winning essay, \$1000 for second place and \$750 for third place, but *CMAJ* reserves the right to withhold some or all awards if the quality of the entries is judged insufficient. The judges, consisting of a panel of editors from *CMAJ*'s scientific and news and features departments, will select the winners based on content, writing style and presentation of manuscripts. Essays should be no longer than 2500 words, including references, and should be double spaced. Citations and references should follow the "Uniform requirements for manuscripts submitted to biomedical journals" (see *CMAJ* 1997;156:270-7; www.cma.ca/publications/mwc/uniform.htm). The winning essays will appear in *CMAJ* and will be edited for length, clarity and consistency with journal style. Authors will be asked to provide a computer diskette containing their essay and will receive an edited copy before publication. Submissions should be sent to the News and Features Editor, *CMAJ*, 1867 Alta Vista Dr., Ottawa ON K1G 3Y6.

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