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They should be ashamed

The spectacle of right-wing Americans doing battle with the editor of a medical journal editor is disheartening to those who espouse editorial independence.¹ My concern is with a right-wing body, the American Medical

Association, and its summary dismissal of Dr. George Lundberg, the respected and long-serving editor of *JAMA*.

During his 17 years with that journal, Lundberg helped it become a first-rank scientific publication. He rigorously adhered to a policy of editorial independence,² a principle endorsed on several occasions by the AMA Board of Trustees.^{3,4} Yet the publication of an unsolicited, peer-reviewed paper,⁵ tangentially relevant to the Clinton affair, was sufficient cause for the AMA's conservative ideologues to dismiss this accomplished editor. They should be ashamed.

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Reproducibility of results with homeopathic remedies

I have been told by several physicians that the question of whether homeopathy works has now been settled — in favour of homeopathy — by a meta-analysis.¹

I had thought that a major problem



with this meta-analysis was widely known and recognized, but apparently it is not. The most spectacular results ever achieved in a randomized placebo-controlled trial of homeopathy were reported in 1991 by Brigo and Serpelloni.² Their results showed a prophylactic effect that was arguably superior to any conventional therapy. A repetition of this study was carried out by Whitmarsh and colleagues³ at the Charing Cross Hospital. Their results showed no benefit whatever; in fact, there was a trend in favour of the placebo. The Italian study was included in the meta-analysis (and given prominence in the table of results), but the British study was not.

This selectively merits particular attention. The Brigo and Serpelloni study reported the largest effect of homeopathy in the world literature.

Surely if an effect of this magnitude is not reproducible in a well-designed and well-executed randomized trial, something is seriously amiss. Even more important, the omission of this “failure of replication” in a meta-analysis can only be construed as bias and must put the validity of the entire meta-analysis in question.

Perhaps the motto for all meta-analyses should be “irreproducible results in, unreliable conclusions out.” To paraphrase Skrabanek,⁴ if there are 2 extreme positions represented by $2 + 2 = 6$ and $2 + 2 = 4$, this doesn't mean that $2 + 2 = 5$.

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A witch hunt against alternative practitioners?

Charlotte Gray writes that the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario insists it does not target doctors who offer alternative therapies and that very few of them have been re-