

EDITOR'S PAGE



War and Peace

The Role of Medical Journals in the Discussion of Conflict

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*"We can know only that we know nothing.
And that is the highest degree of human wisdom."
—Leo Tolstoy, War and Peace (1)*

Medical journals often engage in political topics that affect human health. These topics do have implications for the cardiovascular specialists; for example, they may affect policies such as access to care, stem cell research, and tobacco and food regulation. Medical journals have also provided a forum for discussion of war and peace as it influences global health. In fact, there has been a significant increase in war-related papers published in medical journals over the past decade. This, in part, reflects a better understanding of the health effects of war and the interest of physicians in promoting peace. In addition, organizations such as the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War have published many important papers on the harmful effects of nuclear war and human health. For their efforts, led by cardiologist Bernard Lown, they won the 1985 Nobel Peace Prize (2).

The controversial Open Letter to the People of Gaza (3), published under the editorial leadership of Richard Horton in *The Lancet* this summer, has created great controversy and moved the needle to a place that created discomfort in the publishing spectrum of papers related to war. As editors engaging in this topic, I believe we should abide by several principles:

1. Some medical journals may provide a forum to publish papers that promote peace and report on the adverse health effects of war. However, journals should be a neutral forum for reporting, discussion, debate, analysis, and opinion.
2. As these topics can be highly political, it is important for the journal and the editorial leadership to avoid advocating for a particular point of view that might side with a group. For example, publishing balanced views from both sides of the spectrum presents important information for readers to form their own opinions.
3. Peer review by more than 1 individual would help assure a balanced report with moderation.
4. Finally, linkage to the purpose and mission of the journal is critical. Is the report advancing our knowledge in the promotion of peace and the reduction of war-related health effects?

Although this journal is not opposed to publishing important views on war and peace, there should be clear relevance to the heart failure community. Our war is heart failure, and we have much to do to tackle this challenging scientific endeavor.

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