

EDITOR'S MESSAGE

In the previous issue of the DMJ, 41.1 distributed in November 2014, the mythbuster article “Myth: Mammography for Breast Cancer Screening – Are We Doing More Harm Than Good?” was published. You can find this article on the DMJ’s website, under Archives. The article explored the evidence “for and against the effectiveness of mammography in breast cancer screening,” and sought to provide “physicians with a succinct review on this now-controversial topic, allowing them to discuss both the benefits and potential harms of mammography screening with their patients.”¹ The article highlighted that mammography screening leads to earlier detection of breast cancer, which results in decreased mortality, but that mammography screening also leads to overtreatment and overdiagnosis.¹ Along with the article, an editorial-style cartoon was published, showing a woman about to receive a mammography screening exam with a person hovering over the console, controlling the machine, which features two buttons labeled “detect cancer” and “cause cancer.”¹

As you can read later in this issue, in the ‘Letter to the Editor’ section, the DMJ has received two letters raising concerns with this article. Dr. Sian Iles, radiologist and Section Head of Breast Imaging at the IWK in Halifax, Nova Scotia, wrote a letter addressing the article as a whole with an emphasis on mammography screening guidelines in Nova Scotia. We also received a letter from Patricia Munro, the president of The Nova Scotia Association of Medical Radiation Technologists (NSAMRT). Ms. Munro’s letter focused on the cartoon published alongside the article. The author of the mythbuster article Mark Corkum, a medical student at Dalhousie University, has also written a letter in response to both Dr. Iles’ and Ms. Munro’s letters.

This mythbuster article, along with the other mythbuster articles published in previous issues of the DMJ, were originally written for the Professional Competencies course that medical students complete during their first and second years at Dalhousie Medical School. The mythbuster articles, along with the cartoons published with them, were submitted to and approved by a review committee composed of physicians and ethics professors. The articles recommended by this committee were then submitted to the DMJ for consideration of publication. This review process differs from the standard peer review process at the DMJ, where physicians and other health care professionals that are experts in their respective fields to the topic of the submission, peer review all submissions before consideration of publication. The mythbusters that have been published in the DMJ were

chosen not only because of their high quality but also because they addressed topics the editorial team felt the DMJ readership would benefit from.

As was referenced in the mythbuster article, mammography screening for breast cancer is currently one of the more controversial topics in medicine and the debate regarding its utility is still ongoing. The article certainly has generated a fair amount of discussion here at the DMJ and the editorial team has spent a lot of time considering both sides of the debate in the form of this mythbuster article and the letters we have received. It is not the role of an academic medical journal to make decisions or recommendations regarding treatments, as this is the rightful domain of health care providers and their patients on a case-by-case basis. However, it is the role of a journal to provide a safe space for both sides of a debate to reach out to readers and allow, encourage even, health care professionals and the public to discuss the potential benefits and risks of any treatment or intervention.

With this said, the DMJ wants to stress that while it is the role of an academic journal to engender debate, we never intended any disrespect towards any health care profession. The cartoon published alongside the mythbuster article could be interpreted to be flippant towards or critical of medical radiation technologists and though this was never our aim, for this we apologize.

We encourage our readers to seek out the Letters to the Editor section found near the end of this issue, as we feel this is an important topic that all health care professionals would benefit from reading around. As always, we welcome your feedback.

Regards,
Chelcie Soroka
Editor in Chief

References

1. Corkum M. Myth: mammography for breast cancer screening – are we doing more harm than good? Dalhousie Medical Journal 2014;41(1):43-5. <http://dx.doi.org/10.15273/dmj.Vol41No1.5496>