

Medical Journal Editor Fired

Study on Defining Sex Is 'Political,' AMA Boss Says

By DAVID BROWN
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The impeachment trial of the president may be only two days into arguments, but it's already cost a person a job at an institution seemingly beyond reach of the Clinton scandal.

George D. Lundberg, for 17 years the editor of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, was summarily fired yesterday morning because of the upcoming publication of an article his boss believes is appearing largely "to exact political leverage" for the president in his current impeachment travail.

The paper, based on data collected eight years ago, reveals that in a survey at a midwestern university, only 40 percent of college students would say they'd "had sex" if they participated in an act of oral sex.

The firing decision was made by E. Ratcliffe Anderson, executive vice president of the American Medical Association, which owns the journal but is not involved in its day-to-day workings. Anderson took over AMA leadership last June following a highly embarrassing incident in which the organization entered into an agreement to receive money in exchange for endorsing home health care products made by Sunbeam Corp.

"Dr. Lundberg ... has threatened the historic tradition and integrity of the [journal] by inappropriately and inexcusably intersecting JAMA into a major political debate that has nothing to do with science or medicine," Anderson said at a news conference at the AMA's Chicago headquarters.

The decision was the "culmination of seven months of observation" during which numerous events caused him to lose confidence in Lundberg, Anderson said. The publication of the sex survey, which will appear in next week's edition, was the only objectionable event he would name. He apologized to anyone who may "feel JAMA has been misused in the midst of the most important congressional debate of this century."

Lundberg, 65, is an unusually high-profile member of the elite fraternity that edits internationally influential medical journals. Other editors and observers of American medicine praised him yesterday for raising JAMA to the front rank of that group.

"He was recognized as someone who had taken the journal and turned it around," said Frank Davidoff, editor of the *Annals of*

Internal Medicine. "He hired a spectacular group of editors with very high standards. He worked very, very hard to get a lot of visibility and coverage, and thought that was a major part as his role as an editor."

During Lundberg's tenure, JAMA became a major outlet for epidemiological studies, which ranged in subject from smoking behavior in various ethnic groups and the spread of antibiotic-resistant bacteria to what contrib-

utes to falls in the elderly and the "risk factors" for medical mistakes.

"I think it has become the leading public health journal in the world," said Steven A. Schroeder, president of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, an influential medical charity in Princeton, N.J. "I think people sent their best work to JAMA because of its distribution and its impact."

Lundberg did not shrink from espousing—personally or editorially—controversial positions on issues.

In 1993, he wrote in a JAMA editorial that it would be "immoral" if the Clinton administration's proposed health plan did not quickly include coverage of the uninsured. In 1995, he pushed hard to have violence regarded as a public health problem.

That same year, he published an article interpreting a massive cache of documents spirited away from the Brown & Williamson Tobacco Corp. by a former employee.

Several people interviewed yesterday said Lundberg angered many in the AMA when he asserted in an interview on CBS's "60 Minutes" that one reason for the current low rate of autopsy in the United States is that "some doctors, some medical staffs, are afraid to find out what happened in people who died."

A lawyer for Lundberg released a statement yesterday saying that "it is indeed unfortunate that the [AMA] has chosen to ... jeopardize the editorial integrity and scientific credibility of [JAMA] ... for political ends."

The three-page "Brief Report" analyzed data collected at Indiana University in 1991 by researchers at the Kinsey Institute for Research on Sex, Gender, and Reproduction. Its two authors submitted the manuscript to JAMA in late November, one of them said yesterday, because they perceived there was little objective data informing the national discussion—beginning with last January's revelations of President Clinton's affair with Monica S. Lewinsky—of what constitutes "sex."

The president denied publicly that he had "sexual relations" with Lewinsky, apparently because the oral sex in which they did engage fell outside his definition of the term.

JAMA did not solicit the paper, and there was no discussion of publishing it during the impeachment trial, said June Machover Reinisch, the retired head of the Kinsey Institute, who was a co-author. The journal did, however, put it on an editorial fast track, which substantially shortens the average 180-day delay between submission and publication.

One prominent person in the field said yesterday there "wasn't any doubt that George was a real self-promoter. I think he thought [the upcoming article] would give them terrific publicity. And it did, but the wrong kind, I'm afraid."