



Written by [Veronika Kyrylenko](#) on June 2, 2021

Top Editor of Medical Journal Resigns Over Podcast Questioning Racism in Healthcare System

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The top editor of the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (JAMA) is resigning following outrage in the medical community over comments made about racism by a deputy editor.

Dr. Howard Bauchner, who has been editor-in-chief at JAMA for a decade, will be out of a job as of June 30, the American Medical Association (AMA), which owns and publishes the journal, [said](#) on Tuesday. He had been placed on administrative leave during an investigation of the offending tweet and the podcast that it promoted.

The Twitter [message](#) posted by JAMA on February 24 was to promote a podcast discussion on systemic racism in medicine. “No physician is racist, so how can there be structural racism in health care?” the tweet questioned.

Bauchner said he didn’t write the message or even see it before it was posted, but he was ultimately responsible in his role as editor. “I remain profoundly disappointed in myself for the lapses that led to the publishing of the tweet and podcast.”

The editor also issued a [public apology](#) on March 4 and later removed the podcast from JAMA’s website, saying that comments made in the show were “inaccurate, offensive, hurtful and inconsistent with the standards of JAMA.”

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Dr. Edward Livingston, one of the two doctors featured on the podcast, called structural racism an “unfortunate term” in the medical field. “Personally, I think taking racism out of the conversation will help,” Livingston said on the podcast. “Many people like myself are offended by the implication that we are somehow racist.”

Livingston later resigned as a JAMA deputy editor at Bauchner’s request, and the publication created a new associate editor position for someone with expertise on racism in healthcare.

Another person featured on the podcast, Dr. Mitch Katz, released a [statement](#) in March saying, “Systemic and interpersonal racism both still exist in our country — they must be rooted out.”

But all the efforts at repentance failed to calm the outrage, and Dr. Stella Safo, a primary-care



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physician at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York, and her colleagues started [a petition](#) calling for a formal review of Bauchner’s leadership. The petition, which had been signed by more than 9,000 people as of Wednesday, also demanded JAMA “schedule a series of town hall conversations with Black, Indigenous and People of Color patients, health care staff and allies to ensure restorative justice.”

“This is a real moment for JAMA and the AMA to recreate themselves from a founding history that was based in segregation and racism to one that is now based on racial equity,” Safo [told](#) *The New York Times*.

Dr. James Madara, the AMA’s CEO and executive vice president, [said](#) last month that the organization would implement a three-year plan to focus on the “dismantling of structural racism” in healthcare. Madara expressed regret over the podcast and tweet that “minimized the effects of systemic racism in health care and questioned its profound impact on millions of people across our country.”

Dr. Phil Fontanarosa, who will serve as interim editor-in-chief at JAMA, [said](#) Bauchner led the journal to unimaginable levels of success with his “diligence, perseverance, evidence-based approach and keen instincts.” He added that Bauchner demonstrated a commitment to “diversity, equity and inclusion” by adding more non-white staffers and decision-makers to the organization and encouraging editors to invite more diverse authors to write opinion articles.

Fontanarosa listed Bauchner’s achievements in advancing JAMA, which include launching four new journals, increasing publication of clinical trials, dramatically expanding the journal’s digital reach, and many others. He also noted that JAMA published more than 650 articles on race and racial and ethnic disparities and inequities in the past five years.

Currently, the JAMA network search results in [768](#) articles on “racial/ethnic disparity,” [1,710](#) on “racial differences,” and [186](#) on “racism/antiracism.”

As [reported](#) by WebMd, JAMA is taking additional steps to address “a concern.” Its executive publisher, Thomas Easley, held an employee town hall this week, and said JAMA acknowledges that “structural racism is real, pernicious and pervasive in health care.” The journal is also starting an “end-to-end review” of all editorial processes across all JAMA publications. Finally, the journal will also create a new associate editor position who will provide “insight and counsel” on racism and structural racism in healthcare.

President [Biden](#), along with his top health officials — CDC Director Rochelle [Walensky](#) and director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases Dr. Anthony [Fauci](#) — believe that American healthcare system is structurally racist.



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