In New York

Dr. Blum asked to leave journal post

Alan Blum, MD, 37, avid anti-smoking activist and editor of the New York State Journal of Medicine for the past three years, has been asked to leave the position, New York State Medical Society officials confirmed Jan. 24.

Named as the new editor and director of the division of scientific publications by the medical society was Pascal James Imperato, MD, a former New York City health commissioner. Dr. Imperato has worked for the New York Journal since 1983 as a consulting editor and deputy editor. He also is a professor and chairman of the Dept. of Preventive Medicine and Community Health at New York’s Downstate Medical Center.

Medical society officials called Dr. Blum’s dismissal “a management decision, entirely within the province of the executive vice president.” George Lawrence, MD, the society’s outgoing executive vice president, declined to discuss details of Dr. Blum’s dismissal, saying only that “the decision had nothing to do with the editorial content of the Journal.”

Dr. Blum’s firing was announced formally after a closed executive committee meeting Jan. 23.

Dr. Blum, a former Fishbein Fellow for the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) who had served as the editor of the Medical Journal of Australia for a year before taking the position in New York, is widely known for his antismoking activism. He and several other physicians started “Doctors Ought to Care” (DOC), a physician lobbying group that sought to counteract advertising of unhealthy lifestyles.

Medical society officials maintained that Dr. Blum’s active anti-smoking stance and activities had “nothing whatsoever” to do with his dismissal. A society spokesman called members and officers “very supportive” of the Journal’s anti-smoking position. The society recently banned smoking at its meetings.

Dr. Blum told AMN that the dismissal “was confirmed to me as a matter of editorial policy and direction. I was told more of a house organ rather than a scientific journal was what the society needed.”
Physician asked to leave journal post

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“I was told more of a house organ rather than a scientific journal was what the society needed,” Dr. Blum added.
ASH, Others Protest Firing of Famous Editor After His Criticism of AMA

Dr. Alan Blum, who achieved worldwide fame as an outspoken critic of smoking and those who fail to take forceful action against it, was fired from his position as editor of the New York State Journal of Medicine immediately after he was quoted in a national article questioning the AMA’s claim to leadership in the war on smoking.

ASH and many other antismoking activists have protested, and ASH has sent a special mailing to antismoking organizations asking them to join in the protest.

Dr. Blum believes it may have been this remark, plus his leadership in devoting two—with plans to make it three—issues of the journal exclusively to the nation’s number one preventable health problem, that triggered his firing after a secret meeting without any due process and with minimal severance. He was replaced by someone he had hired as his assistant.

On December 23, 1985, an Associated Press article about the AMA’s decision to seek a ban on all tobacco advertising was flashed over the AMA’s wire service. It included Dr. Blum’s comment that “for much of the last seventeen years they have politely patted people on the head who were trying to raise the issue [of smoking]. To assert now that they are leaders is a bitter irony that sticks in my craw.”

The very next working day, December 26th, a secret meeting was held and subsequently Dr. Blum received a most unwelcome Christmas surprise: He had been fired from a position he had held for three years, just after receiving a substantial salary increase that finally permitted him to purchase a house, while he and his wife awaited the arrival of their third child.

Officials of the Medical Society of the State of New York deny that the decision to fire Blum was based on his outspoken views concerning smoking, or was taken because he was then planning a third hard-hitting issue devoted to smoking. It was solely a management decision, and had “nothing whatsoever” to do with his active antismoking stance and activities.” But Blum contends that he “was done in by the smoke-filled room,” and that he “can’t think of a nicer gift for the tobacco industry.”

The Society claims that it was very supportive of Dr. Blum’s antismoking stance, citing their own recent decision to ban smoking at their own meetings. But Blum says that he was told by a Society official that one Journal issue devoted to smoking was “all right,” that the second broke “no new ground,” and that a third “may not be appropriate for a state medical journal.”

Coincidentally with his firing, the status of the Editor of the Journal was downgraded from a full-time position to a half-time position. Blum says that the Society’s outgoing Executive Vice President, Dr. George Lawrence, Jr., made it clear to him that they were more interested in having a house organ than a scientific journal devoted to major health and social issues such as smoking.

Many people have already written to the New York State Medical Society to protest Dr. Blum’s firing. Here is what U.S. Surgeon General C. Everett Koop said:

Alan Blum has made the New York State Journal, through its two special issues on smoking, a journal of national and international significance. I probably am as deeply involved in the smoking issue here and abroad as anyone, and I can attest to the fact that whether in foreign ministries of health, or talking with private sector activists, Alan Blum has put the New York State Journal on the map and has given it credibility far above most such journals.

I feel that it is my business to call your attention to the great loss on the

(Continued on next page)
News You Should Know

Switching to pipes or cigars doesn't necessarily lessen the health hazards of smoking, according to a new study by the School of Public Health at the University of Minnesota published in the Journal of the American Medical Association. The reason is that cigarette smokers who switch often smoke more or inhale more deeply than those who never smoked cigarettes, thereby cancelling out at least some of the benefits of switching.

The Maryland House of Delegates, unanimously and with no debate, passed a bill to ban the sale of clove cigarettes, which reportedly have been implicated in at least 12 cases of severe illness and other deaths between March 1984 and May 1985. But the Specialty Tobacco Council, Inc., which represents those who make, import, and sell the cigarettes, is up in arms, claiming that the legislation is unconstitutional and smacks of prohibition.

Singer Connie Francis was arrested at an Atlanta airport for refusing to stop smoking while her plane was refueling.

“Tobacco Litigation” is the title of a seminar to be presented by the National Law Journal in New York City on May 8-9. For information call (212) 741-8300.

Linjeflyg, the major Swedish domestic airline, has banned all smoking on its flights as of January 20th.