

Editor sidelined after medical journal racism podcast outcry

26 March 2021, by Lindsey Tanner

The top editor at the *Journal of the American Medical Association* has been sidelined amid outcry from Black physicians over a tweet and podcast on structural racism.

"No physician is racist, so how can there be structural racism in health care?" the tweet read in part, promoting a podcast that critics called cringeworthy and appalling.

JAMA removed the podcast earlier this month and its editor-in-chief, Dr. Howard Bauchner, issued an apology. But the independent association committee that oversees the [journal](#) started an investigation and on Thursday placed Bauchner on administrative leave pending the outcome.

"The decision to place the editor-in-chief on administrative leave neither implicates nor exonerates individuals and is standard operating procedure for such investigations," the committee said in a statement.

Dr. Phil Fontanarosa, *JAMA*'s [executive editor](#), will serve as interim editor.

"It's a reasonable first step but it should not be seen as mission accomplished," Dr. Raymond Givens, a Black cardiologist in New York, said Friday. He has been a vocal online critic of a lack of diversity among [editors](#) of [JAMA](#) and other prominent medical journals.

The podcast was billed as a discussion for skeptics and featured two white doctors: a deputy journal editor who expressed discomfort with the word "racism" and a physician who runs a New York City health system.

That deputy later resigned at Bauchner's request and *JAMA* created a new associate editor position for someone with expertise in racism in [health care](#)

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The Chicago-based American Medical Association owns and publishes *JAMA* and had called the [podcast](#) wrong and harmful. It has no editorial control over *JAMA*'s content but Bauchner reports to the oversight committee.

Only one of the seven oversight committee members is Black and the editorial boards of *JAMA* and other leading medical journals are mostly white, Givens noted.

"Without diversity, you don't know what you don't know," he said. "With such a non-diverse panel of people, you have all these blind spots that allow these podcasts to go from execution to publication without anybody saying, 'Wait a minute, this is ill-advised.'"

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