

PROFESSION

American Medical News ceases publication after 55-year run

■ Unsustainable financial losses forced the move despite the newspaper's editorial quality, the AMA's senior management says. The Association's other news operations will be enhanced.

By KEVIN B. O'REILLY ([HTTP://WWW.AMEDNEWS.COM/APPS/PBCS.DLL/PERSONALIA?ID=KOREILLY](http://WWW.AMEDNEWS.COM/APPS/PBCS.DLL/PERSONALIA?ID=KOREILLY)) — Posted Sept. 2, 2013

A dramatic drop in medical-publishing revenues has resulted in the closure of *American Medical News*, effective with this final edition of the newspaper.

Published for more than five decades, *AMNews* was hit hard by industrywide trends. The newspaper's revenue fell by two-thirds during the last decade, said Thomas J. Easley, senior vice president and publisher of periodic publications at the American Medical Association.

"Over a 10-year period of time, we were not able to generate an operating surplus for *AMNews*," Easley said. "For some of those years, we were closer to break-even, and in others, we were further away. The last three years saw us get further and further from reaching break-even."

In 2009, the tabloid newspaper's print run was cut in half, from 48 times a year to 24, while new stories were published each weekday at the *AMNews* website, amednews.com. But that change was not enough to turn the tide because of steeply declining ad dollars, Easley said.

The Association's publishing division, which includes *AMNews*, saw revenues drop 14.4% to \$55.8 million in 2012. That was down from \$65.2 million in 2011 and was principally driven by a \$10 million drop in ad sales, said the AMA's 2012 annual report.

Pharmaceutical spending's impact

Across the medical-publishing sector, spending on print advertising fell by more than 20% in 2012, according to data from the marketing consultancy Kantar Media.

Pharmaceutical spending on all professional journal advertising fell by 31%, from \$470 million in 2007 to \$322 million in 2011, the most recent year of data made available by IMS Health, a market-analysis firm.

Experts often have blamed the steep drops in ad spending on the number of top-selling drugs going off patent, without new blockbuster pharmaceuticals to replace them. Drugmakers typically devote most of their advertising to the first years after a new drug launch.

The Journal of the American Medical Association and the eight other JAMA Network specialty journals are better suited to weather the ad-sales decline than *AMNews* was, Easley said. They have shifted their business model so that most revenues now come from subscriptions and institutional site license agreements, he added.

Making *AMNews* an online-only publication was not feasible, because 90% of the newspaper's revenues came from print advertising, Easley added.

"The challenge we faced was the decline of the business model for print news. This made the decision that we made painful, but in many ways inescapable," he said. "This was not attributable to the product, which was still of a very high caliber."

As a result of this newspaper's closure, 20 full-time reporters, editors, copy editors, art designers and advertising salespeople in Chicago, Washington, D.C., and New Jersey lost their jobs. The Web archive of *American Medical News* articles will remain at amednews.com through Dec. 31. The Association is working on a plan to make the

content publicly available in 2014.

The AMA has other ways to deliver news to physicians, said Rodrigo Sierra, senior vice president, chief communications and marketing officer at the AMA.

AMA Wire, a weekly email alert, provides updates about the Association's activities targeted to various kinds of doctors, such as female physicians and doctors in small-group practices. It is archived on the AMA's website ([link](#)).

AMA Morning Rounds, launched in 2006, is an exclusive benefit of AMA membership. Delivered each weekday about 7 a.m. Central time, *Morning Rounds* summarizes and links to medical stories getting the most coverage among consumer-oriented news organizations.

"A lot of physicians like *Morning Rounds*, whether they want to spend five minutes with it or a whole hour," Sierra said. "And it's there each morning in their inbox."

Together, *AMA Wire* and *Morning Rounds* have about 300,000 email subscribers, though there is some crossover. These newsletters also have a high "open rate," meaning subscribers are likely to click on the messages to read more.

Sierra and his colleagues are working on a plan, to be implemented before the new year, to enhance these services to make them easier to share and access across different computing devices. AMA members and others can subscribe to these alerts or other email services at the Association's website ([link](#)).

Journalistic excellence

American Medical News' closure comes despite widespread recognition of its editorial excellence.

During the last decade that saw so many financial struggles, the newspaper won more than 60 journalism awards. The American Society of Healthcare Publication Editors named *AMNews* its publication of the year for 2007. The newspaper was named media brand of the year for 2006 by *Medical Marketing & Media*, an influential publication that covers health care marketing.

Of the newspaper's print circulation of 215,000, most readers were office-based internists or family physicians. The *American Medical News* website drew 430,000 monthly page views. On Twitter, the @amednews account amassed more than 50,000 followers.

This newspaper was first published as *The AMA News* on Sept. 22, 1958, when the average annual medical school tuition was \$773. In 1969, the publication was renamed *American Medical News*, reflecting a mandate to further broaden its coverage of events and trends in medicine.

The editorial that announced the name change now reads as prescient: "With this issue we close an old friend who has served well."

BACK TO TOP

EXTERNAL LINKS

Manage your AMA email subscriptions ([link: http://www.ama-assn.org/go/email](http://www.ama-assn.org/go/email))

AMA Wire archive ([link: http://www.ama-assn.org/go/amawire](http://www.ama-assn.org/go/amawire))

"2012 Annual Report," American Medical Association ([link: http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/about-ama/ama-annual-report.page](http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/about-ama/ama-annual-report.page))

"Journal Ad Report 2012: In a Bind," *Medical Marketing & Media*, March 1 ([link: http://www.mmm-online.com/journal-ad-report-2012-in-a-bind/article/281402/](http://www.mmm-online.com/journal-ad-report-2012-in-a-bind/article/281402/))

"MM&M All-Stars: Media Brand of the Year," *Medical Marketing & Media*, Jan. 1, 2007 ([link: http://www.mmm-online.com/mmm-all-stars-media-brand-of-the-year/article/30180/](http://www.mmm-online.com/mmm-all-stars-media-brand-of-the-year/article/30180/))

“As Texas Editor Heads American Medical News, Former Chiefs Recall the Paper's Origin, History,” *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, April 16, 1997 (link: <http://jama.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?doi=10.1001/jama.1997.03540390014006>)

[BACK TO TOP](#)

Copyright © 2013 American Medical Association. All rights reserved.