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To the Editorial Board, *Annals of Internal Medicine*:

In two replies to comments about their paper, “Medical Masks Versus N95 Respirators for Preventing COVID-19 Among Health Care Workers: a Randomized Trial”, Loeb et. al. suggested that some of those providing feedback may be biased by financial benefit. They said this specifically about Prof. Lisa Brosseau and the co-signatories to a comment by Dr. Kevin Hedges and his colleagues.

Such personal accusations contravene the codes of conduct of professional organisations with which I am acquainted, and/or a member, especially without convincing evidence. I suspect that if this had been stated about a medical practitioner, the *Annals* would find it unacceptable (perhaps defamatory) and would not have published the statement. Can the editors please explain why they published these comments when the accusation is levelled at those with similar professional standing but different training?

The unsubstantiated allegation about Dr. Hedges and colleagues is false and mean-spirited. Dr. Hedges and other signatories are part of a large volunteer group of which I am a member: many are professional occupational hygienists, like Dr. Hedges, and a number are retired. As volunteers, we have no possible financial gain, nor reason for an ideological bias. Our only interest is the moral one – included in the occupational hygienists’ Code of Ethics – to protect the health and safety of healthcare and other workers above all else.

Some might consider unsubstantiated personal accusations serious enough to take to the relevant medical associations. For now, it might restore confidence in the accusing authors’ professionalism, and in the *Annals* itself, if the Editorial Board required Loeb and colleagues immediately to present to *Annals* readers any specific data (rather than insinuations) they have supporting these claims. If they cannot, the Board should require them promptly to submit an apology to those they maligned, including Prof. Brosseau, also for publication in the *Annals*.

I look forward to your reply. Thank you.

Yours sincerely,



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Disclosure:

Dr. Simon Smith is retired from a career in respirator filter design with a major manufacturer. He serves voluntarily in working group leadership roles for the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) in areas addressing respiratory protective equipment performance and use, including biological aerosol selection guidance in CSA Z94.4 "Selection, Use and Care of Respirators". He has served as President of the International Society for Respiratory Protection and as Chair of the Respiratory Protection Committee of the American Industrial Hygiene Association, and currently participates in the Personal Protective Equipment Committee of the US National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine.