

# U of T studies ties between funding and researchers

BY MARK REYNOLDS

Pharmaceutical researchers may be compromising their credibility by not disclosing financial relationships with drug companies when publishing research.

A study by Dr. Allan Detsky of the University of Toronto suggests that researchers that have financial ties with drug companies, tend to be more favourable in their conclusions when investigating the effects of those companies products.

Though most scientific journals state who has sponsored the research results they publish, they don't cover all the types of relationships researchers may have. Detsky's survey asked researchers to disclose five different types of relationships they had with drug companies. This included grants or contracts, fees to speak at symposiums, consulting fees, travel expenses, or money for educational purposes.

"We found that 100 per cent of

the supportive authors had financial relationships [with drug companies]," said Detsky.

Detsky does not want to imply that the researchers are being "bought off" by companies.

"We can't even tell if an author wrote an opinion and then was approached by the pharmacy company, or received the money after writing the opinion," he said.

Detsky says the main issue is not necessarily tainted results, but credibility.

"Editors and authors need to be more sensitive," he said, adding that authors declare any and all ties to companies when they publish, and allow the reading public to better judge the quality of the research.

Dr. Pollen Young, who does research for the college of pharmacy at Dalhousie, said that his research is not subject to these kinds of biases.

"The kind of research at Dalhousie is investigative research...we are free to publish

what we want," he said. He pointed out that most journals do disclose direct financial ties to published research.

University of Manitoba researcher Dr. Keith Simons said that there is no reason to be alarmed about the results of Detsky's survey.

"The worst that can happen is a slight bias in the discussion in a paper," he said.

Simons also teaches a course that gives pharmacy students guidance in judging the quality of research papers.

"The only thing you need to be concerned about is if the funding effects the results of the research."

Simons said that for most research performed at universities, researchers approach the pharmacy companies with a project. This is done with the full understanding that results will be published whether or not the findings are positive for the products of the companies involved.

Simons added that drug

company funding is crucial for research in Canada.

"If we didn't have support from pharmaceutical companies, research would be severely inhibited."

Though Detsky claims that all travel grants should be declared in publications, Simons said that those expenses are important to the quality of research, and not often large enough amounts to be concerned about.

"We're usually talking peanuts," he said. He added that most conferences attended by researchers help them a great deal because they receive peer feedback.

Dr Kanji Nakatsu, co-editor of the Canadian Journal of Physiology and Pharmacology does not believe that industry funding necessarily means tainted results.

"Normally we don't request that kind of information. We expect everybody to disclose the source of their funding."

He pointed out that universities have become more dependant on private sector funding, but that he believes whatever bias occurs is outweighed by the research itself. He also pointed out that disclosure of financial ties is more important in journals aimed at non-specialists.

"There would be room for bias...you're talking the interpretation of the paper. [Our] audience is usually base scientists that don't write prescriptions.

"If it was in the CMAJ

[Canadian Medical Association Journal] that could have an effect on prescribing practices," he said.

However, John Hoey, editor-in-chief of CMAJ, said the potential for conflict of interest is something that editors must be vigilant about.

"[Detsky's study] does seem to indicate an association," he said.

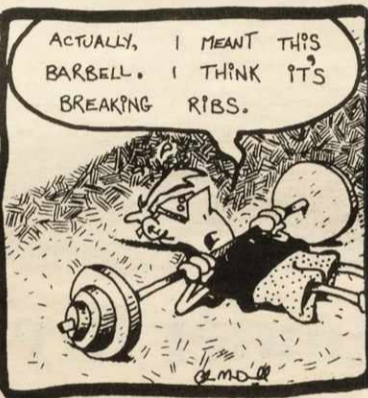
Hoey said that up until a year ago, his journal — read by 60,000 of the approximately 80,000 practicing physicians in the country — only asked very general questions about conflicts of interest in articles they publish. They have since become much more rigorous.

Authors are now required to disclose any stock they own in a company, honoraria they may have received, consultive work, or funds for continuing education. This information is now published along with research articles.

Hoey pointed out that financial relationships are not the only potential area for concern.

"You could be married to someone from a company, or enemies with someone...there could be personal issues as well."

Although most researchers have good working relationships with drug companies, Dr Nancy Olivieri of the University of Toronto faced the threat of litigation if she published negative findings from her research for Apotex Inc. in 1996. However, she did reveal the results of her research to a conference that year, and as yet no litigation has proceeded.



# GENERAL ELECTIONS

## & Referendum

### MARCH 11, 12 & 13

**NOMINATION WEEK**  
FEBRUARY 16th - 20th

- DSU President
- DSU Executive VP
- DSU VP Community Affairs
- DSU VP Internal
- DSU VP Student Advocacy
- Senate Reps (3)
- Board of Governors Reps (2)

Nomination packages available @ the  
DSU Council Offices, Room 222 Dal SUB

DalTech Student Union  
Office #J126A in the FH Sexton  
Gymnasium

**CAMPAIGN WEEK**  
MARCH 4th - 10th

### CANDIDATE FORUMS

Dal SUB lobby	11:30 am	Mar 4
Howe Hall	7:00 pm	Mar 4
DalTech Alumni Lounge	11:30 am	Mar 5
Shirreff Hall	7:00 pm	Mar 5
Dal SUB lobby	11:30 am	Mar 9
Tupper Link	12:30 pm	Mar 10

### REFERENDUM SUBJECTS

- Dal Health Plan
- DalTech Sextant Newspaper
- Dal Women's Centre
- World University Service of Canada

**VOTE**  
MARCH 11th - 13th

### 20 POLLING BOOTHS

9am - 5pm	
A&A Building	Life Science (LSC)
Faculty of Architecture	School of Business
Dalplex	Shirreff Hall
DalTech Alumni Lounge	Tupper Link
Dunn Building	Weldon Law Building
FH Sexton Gymnasium	Watch for Rovers
Forrest Building	Fenwick
Howe Hall	Rebecca Cohn
MM O'Brien Hall	School of Social Work
Maritime Centre	University Ave.
9am - 9pm	
Killam Library	Kellogg Library
Student Union Building	
5pm - 9pm	
the Brezeway	

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