

SCIENCE & ENVIRONMENT

Thalassemia children left in the lurch *Toronto doctor quits investigation over allegations of bias*

BY CARLA TONELLI

TORONTO (CUP) — A prominent doctor who made headlines over a soured research contract with a drug company has said she will no longer participate in the independent investigation of the affair.

Dr. Nancy Olivieri said the decision was made partly because her suggestions for candidates to join the review, which until now has been headed solely by Dr. Arnold Naimark, were rejected.

Set up by the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto, the review has been examining what happened when Olivieri conducted clinical trials in 1993 of the drug deferiprone, aimed at treating the blood disorder thalassemia. The trials were partly funded by pharmaceutical giant Apotex Inc., whose contract with Olivieri prohibited publication of any results without its approval. Controversy erupted when Apotex denied the doctor's request to tell her patients their health could be affected by the drug, saying her research was

flawed.

But last August, Olivieri's results were published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

Naimark was charged with the responsibility of looking into what happened. But Olivieri and her supporters say Naimark should not be the sole reviewer because of his previous relationship with Apotex

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while president of the University of Manitoba.

"The board already has in place who they want," Hospital for Sick Children doctor Peter Durie, a supporter of Olivieri's, said last Wednesday. "Dr. Naimark was hand picked by the board.

"We thought, and think, it only fair that we should have the ability to ensure that the next two candidates are truly independent candidates without conflict or possible board influence. Our two nominees more than fit that description."

But the two names were rejected, Olivieri's supporters say.

Also last Wednesday, Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children said the investigation would continue and Naimark would be asked to select the two panelists himself.

Under a process agreed to by both sides, both Olivieri and the hospital were to approve eight names out of a list of 14 eminent, international scientists. That list was provided by Dr. Henry Friesen, the president of the Medical Research Council of Canada, who is mediating the review dispute.

While the Hospital for Sick Children approved seven names, Olivieri and her supporters only approved two, which were rejected.

"Given the failure of the other side to agree, the board has decided to move forward immediately and has asked Dr. Naimark to select two associate panelists from Dr. Friesen's original list of 14 or any others he wishes," wrote Jim Pitblado, chairman of Sick Kids' board of trustees, in a prepared statement.

The deadline for the review's

completion is Nov. 30.

Another reason for Olivieri's pull-out is the fact the Hospital for Sick Children has circulated emails about the issue, she said.

Last month, both sides agreed to keep the review debate internal until its results are released.

"Part of the reason we feel so discouraged today is because they have not made overtures to look at the two people we proposed and have not honoured the spirit of this agreement, which is a peace agreement, in terms of going out

there and promoting their view or our view," Olivieri said.

"Now we don't know what to do."

Since the Hospital for Sick Children is a fully-affiliated teaching hospital of the University of Toronto, all physicians are thereby members of the faculty of medicine.

Last month, concerns were raised over U of T's active pursuit of a \$20-to-\$30-million donation from the Apotex Foundation, which is owned by Apotex Inc.

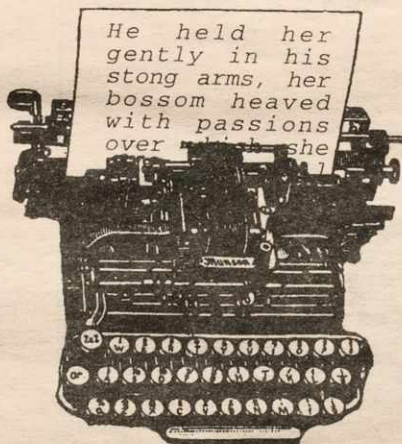
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