



Vaccine Studies: Under the Influence of Pharma

By Barbara Loe Fisher

If you take more than a casual look at the way the mass vaccination system in the U.S. works, you see that pharmaceutical companies marketing vaccines have a lot of clout.

It was the pharmaceutical industry that told Congress in 1982 that they were going to leave the nation without vaccines if they didn't get liability protection but have opposed making it less difficult for vaccine victims to obtain federal compensation in the U.S. Court of Claims under a 1986 law that gave them liability protection.

It is Pharma lobbyists, who bully the FDA into fast tracking vaccines like Gardasil and who sit at the CDC's policymaking tables urging that new vaccines be recommended for use by all children so they can persuade state legislators to mandate vaccines like influenza vaccine.

How Big Pharma Influences Medical Journals

A recent study published in the British Medical Journal reveals the clout that Big Pharma has in the world of medicine journal publishing, specifically the publishing of scientific articles about vaccines. In a Cochrane Collaboration review and analysis of published influenza vaccine studies found that influenza vaccine studies sponsored by industry are treated more favorably by medical journals even when the studies are of poor quality.

This analysis confirms that drug companies marketing vaccines have a major influence on what gets published and is said about vaccines in medical journals. It is no wonder that there are almost no studies published in the medical literature that call into question vaccine safety.

The preferential treatment of Pharma-funded studies also explains why the risks of an inappropriately fast-tracked vaccine like Gardasil are underplayed in the medical literature and why a physician like Andrew Wakefield, M.D. who dared to publish a study in 1998 in a medical journal (The Lancet) calling for more scientific investigation into the possible link between MMR vaccine and regressive autism, has



been mercilessly persecuted for more than a decade, by both Pharma-funded special interest groups, as well as public health officials maintaining close relationships with vaccine manufacturers.

Study Finds No Correlation Between Quality of Study and Publication

This recent review identified and assessed 274 published studies on influenza vaccines for their methodological quality and found no relationship between study quality, publication in prestige journals or their subsequent citation in other articles.

The researchers also found that most influenza vaccine studies are of poor quality but those with conclusions favorable to influenza vaccinations are of significantly lower methodological quality. The single most important factor determining where the studies were published or how much they were cited was sponsorship, with those partially or wholly funded by the pharmaceutical industry having higher visibility.

The authors commented:

"The study shows that one of the levers for accessing prestige journals is the financial size of your sponsor. Pharma sponsors order many reprints of studies supporting their products, often with in house translations into many languages. They also purchase advertising space in the journal. Many publishers openly advertise these services on their website. It is time journals made a full disclosure of their sources of funding".

The HPV Vaccine -- Just One Example of Inappropriate Influence Endangering Public Health

Last month the National Vaccine Information Center (www.NVIC.org) called on the Obama Administration and Congress to investigate Gardasil vaccine risks. NVIC has long questioned the inappropriate influence of vaccine manufacturers in federal vaccine licensing and policymaking and state vaccine mandates.

In 2006, Merck's Gardasil vaccine was fast tracked by the FDA at Merck's request and in 2007 Merck lobbyists mounted an aggressive lobbying campaign to get Gardasil mandated by state legislators for all sixth grade girls, which would have assured the big drug company a predictable market.

The Pharma lobbying effort in 2007 to get all states to mandate Gardasil failed but every other vaccine produced by drug companies and licensed by the FDA in the past quarter century has been mandated. Those new mandates were added to state vaccine laws by legislators and public health officials at the urging of vaccine manufacturer lobbyists and Pharma funded organizations touting vaccine studies published in the medical literature.

Massive Increase in Number of Vaccines Given

In the past three decades, the numbers of doses of government recommended vaccines for children and medical organizations like the American Academy of Pediatrics has tripled to 69 doses of 16 vaccines, with 48 doses of 14 vaccines targeted to children under age six.

Pharma lobbyists have persuaded most states to pass laws requiring two to three dozen doses of most of the 16 government recommended vaccines. Last year New Jersey became the first state to mandate influenza vaccine for children attending daycare and school.

In the past few years, Dr. Jefferson has authored several independent reviews of influenza studies published in the medical literature for the Cochrane Collaboration, which have been published in the British Medical Journal, questioning the quality of published scientific evidence for influenza vaccine

effectiveness and safety for the elderly as well as children.

Clearly, if the makers and marketers of vaccines can influence the quality and quantity of the scientific evidence published in the medical literature proving that vaccines are safe and effective -- evidence that is used by states to mandate vaccines and by the U.S. Court of Claims to deny compensation to vaccine injured children -- then Congress was wrong in 1986 to protect the makers and marketers of vaccines from liability for injuries and deaths caused by those vaccines.

Government Vaccine Recommendations Based on Tainted Evidence

The U.S. Court of Claims vaccine injury compensation awards, and state vaccine mandates are justified on the strength of scientific published in medical journals.

It is time for medical journals to disclose all financial ties to the pharmaceutical industry. It is time for studies questioning the safety and effectiveness of vaccines to receive a fair hearing in scientific journals rather than editors confining themselves to primarily publishing studies funded by the pharmaceutical industry maintaining that every vaccine is totally safe, effective and necessary.

Kudos to the British Medical Journal for having the integrity to publish Dr. Jefferson's comprehensive analysis of pharmaceutical money influence on vaccine studies published in the medical literature. Hopefully, this will be a wake-up call for the scientific community, Congress and the public to put an end to the undue influence the pharmaceutical industry has on the science and policy of mass vaccination in the U.S.



Dr. Mercola's Comments:

Barbara Loe Fisher, co-founder of the National Vaccine Information Center (NVIC) has hit it on the head with this article. There are many disturbing issues at work behind and beneath the vaccine research that actually ends up seeing the light of day.

For example, the peer review process, which is the basic method for checking medical research to see if it's fit to publish, is not without serious flaws.

For one, it's almost impossible to find out what happens in the vetting process as peer reviewers are unpaid, anonymous and unaccountable. And although the system is based on the best of intentions, it lacks consistent standards and the expertise of the reviewers can vary widely from journal to journal.

This leaves the field wide open to reviewers to base their decisions on their own prejudices. And more often than not, there is a distinct tendency to let flawed papers through if their conclusion is favorable for the vaccine.

As Dr. John Ioannidis (see below) has previously stated, there appears to be an underlying assumption that scientific information is a commodity, and hence, scientific journals are a medium for its dissemination and exchange.

When scientific journals function in this manner, it has major consequences for the entire field of science and medicine, and ultimately for you and your family's health – especially in the case of vaccines, as many wind up being mandated for all children.

While idealists will likely not agree with this viewpoint, realists can acknowledge that journals generate revenue and build careers. Publication is also critical for both drug development and marketing, which are needed to attract venture capital.

So, sad to say, it is ever so clear that the current system is highly susceptible to manipulation of both pocketbooks and ego's.

Scientific Claims -- A 50/50 Chance of Being True

Back in 2005, Dr. John Ioannidis, an epidemiologist at Ioannina School of Medicine, Greece, showed that there is **less than a 50 percent chance that the results of any randomly chosen scientific paper will be true**.

Dr. Ioannidis did it again just last year, showing that much of scientific research being published is highly questionable. According to that analysis, the studies most likely to be published are those that oversell dramatic or otherwise considered important results.

Results that oftentimes turn out to be false later on.

Prestigious journals boast that they are very selective, turning down the vast majority of papers that are submitted to them. The assumption is that they therefore publish only the best scientific work.

But Dr. Ioannidis study of 49 papers in leading journals, which had been cited by more than 1,000 other scientists -- in other words, well-regarded research -- showed that within only a few years, almost a third of the papers had been refuted by other studies.

Making matters worse, the "hotter" the field, the greater the competition, and the more likely that published research in top journals could be wrong.

Who's Paying for the Science?

One of the simple ways to evaluate how likely any manipulation has occurred is to track down who financed the study. The reason you want to do this is likely very obvious as it's well known that studies funded by industry or conducted by researchers with industry ties tend to favor corporate interests.

This makes perfect logical sense if you consider that no one in their right mind would pay for a study, and then make sure it gets disseminated if it turned out the drug or vaccine in question was ineffective, or worse, downright dangerous.

However sometimes this will be difficult to do as the funding is cleverly disguised through benign or even philanthropic-sounding front names.

What Does This Mean to Your Health?

First of all, you need to realize that medical journals have enormous influence on which drugs doctors prescribe, the treatment hospitals provide, and the vaccines that your child will be exposed to.

As Fisher explains above, more and more vaccines are being mandated based on the studies presumably showing them to be "safe and effective." This is a travesty, and an absolute disaster for our youth.

Here are some other ways this flawed system of publishing industry-tainted science can, and does, influence medicine and your health:

- Drug prescription deaths accounted for 95 percent of all unintentional and undetermined poisoning deaths in 2004
- "Preventive" drugs and vaccines for everything from cancer to dental caries are on the rise, which, of course, are prescribed to perfectly healthy people
- Pharmaceutical companies are also pushing for more and more non-logical uses of their drugs, such as administering the HPV vaccine to young boys, even though they do not have the prerequisite anatomy to contract the disease
- Death attributed to psychotherapeutic drugs (anti-depressants and sedatives) nearly doubled, from 671 to 1,300 deaths between 1999 and 2004
- State mandated drugging of children as young as three years old with psychiatric drugs is now on a steady rise
- In January 2006, the FDA put in place the preemption protection scheme that bans private lawsuits against drug companies and physicians in state courts, once a drug has achieved the FDA's stamp of approval

What Can You Learn From This?

When evaluating health news, it is wise to be cautious even if it's published in a scientific journal. You must come to the realization that YOU are responsible for your, and your family's, health; not me, not your doctor, and certainly not drug companies that try to convince you that your child not only needs every single vaccine mandated -- and that every single one is safe -- in order to sell their wares.

Remember, medicine is a business. And so are the journals publishing the science used as the basis for medicine and as such they are highly susceptible to major conflicts of interests because of the very large sums of money involved here.

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