

## Can Medical Research be Trusted?

Most medical therapies are predicated upon “evidenced based” research, particularly in the allopathic profession, where studies are used to justify therapeutic protocols. A prime example of this is statin therapy for high cholesterol where studies over the years have lead to increasingly stringent (narrower) guidelines for their use, resulting in more and more prescriptions. In 2009 the top 2 statin medication prescriptions earned drug companies \$7,671,331.00. These same drugs earned \$11,696,236.00 in 2014, a 65% increase [Drugs.com]. This increase is due largely to upsurges in prescriptions predicated upon “evidence based” studies released from 2009 to 2011 that narrowed prescribing guidelines.

However during this period, other research has also shown that statin medications do not reduce the risk of heart attack but does increase the risk of myositis, muscle wasting, cancer and diabetes. Still, allopathic physicians based upon “current” studies frequently recommend these medications.

A recent article published in The Ethical Nag quotes a former editor of the New England Journal of medicine as saying *“It is simply no longer possible to believe much of the clinical research that is published, or to rely on the judgment of trusted physicians or authoritative medical guidelines. I take no pleasure in this conclusion, which I reached slowly and reluctantly over my two decades as an editor of The New England Journal of Medicine.”*

Harvard Medical Schools Dr. Marcia Angell cites several examples where researchers produced research whose conclusions were not supported by the data obtained. Based upon these conclusions, changes were made in how prescription drugs were to be administered and to whom. In one of the examples cited, a Harvard Medical school psychiatrist reported that data supported the use of drug therapy in children as young as 2 years of age for being bipolar and thus needing drug therapy, when in fact the data in his own study did not support the conclusion. Subsequently it was learned that the researcher had received \$1.6 million in speaking fees from drug companies from 2000 to 2007. During this period the pharmaceutical industry saw profits increase “tens of billions of dollars”.

Consider that drug companies spent \$8 billion in 2000 on advertising and employed 83,000 sales representatives to influence doctors. Additionally, they provided another \$8 billion in free samples to physicians which are handed out by your doctor's office. Direct consumer advertising has grown from \$791 million in 1996 to \$2.5 billion in 2000, accounting for about 16 % of drug promotion. This figure is probably much higher in 2016 as is evidenced by the number of prescription drug advertisements run during prime time television. This is one of the reasons that prescription drug prices are highest in the US as other countries negotiate lower drug prices for their consumers.

So the question posited is: can medical research be trusted? The answer is that medical research can be crafted to obtain the outcomes needed to justify the ends such as the sale of a drug. Medical research also frequently overlooks critical data that does not support the desired outcomes as in the previously mentioned example. Medical ethicists are increasingly questioning medical research and drug company ties to researchers as unethical and morally corrupt.

As medical consumers and physicians, we must question the premises upon which prescriptions are being made and do our own research as to the necessity, safety and effectiveness of what is being prescribed.

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