

Beware the Drug Companies, How they Deceive Us: "Criticizing Big Pharma"

By Dr. Gary G. Kohls

Note: Dr Marcia Angell was fired from her long-held job as executive editor of the once prestigious New England Journal of Medicine because of an editorial that she wrote criticizing the pharmaceutical industry, criticisms that she elaborated on in her book, "The Truth About the Drug Companies: How They Deceive Us and What to Do About It".

"...Similar conflicts of interest and biases exist in virtually every field of medicine, particularly those that rely heavily on drugs or devices. 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." – Marcia Angell, M, author of "The Truth About the Drug Companies: How They Deceive Us and What to Do About It"

"Consider the clinical trials by which drugs are tested on human subjects. Before a new drug can enter the market, its manufacturer must sponsor clinical trials to show the Food and Drug Administration that the drug is safe and effective, usually as compared with a placebo or dummy pill. The results of all the trials are submitted to the FDA, and if one or two drug trials are

positive—that is, if they show effectiveness without serious risk—the drug is usually approved, even if all the other trials are negative.” – Marcia Angell, MD, author of “Drug Companies and Doctors: A Story of Corruption”

“In view of this control and the conflicts of interest that permeate the enterprise, it is not surprising that industry-sponsored trials published in medical journals consistently favor sponsors —largely because negative results are not published, positive results are repeatedly published in slightly different forms, and a positive spin is put on even negative results. A review of seventy-four clinical trials of antidepressants, for example, found that thirty-seven of thirty-eight positive studies were published. But of the thirty-six negative studies, thirty-three were either not published or published in a form that conveyed a positive outcome.” – Marcia Angell, MD

“Our health care system is based on the premise that health care is a commodity like VCRs or computers and that it should be distributed according to the ability to pay in the same way that consumer goods are. That’s not what health care should be. Health care is a need; it’s not a commodity, and it should be distributed according to need. If you’re very sick, you should have a lot of it. If you’re not sick, you shouldn’t have a lot of it. But this should be seen as a personal, individual need, not as a commodity to be distributed like other marketplace commodities. That is a fundamental mistake in the way this country, and only this country, looks at health care. And that market ideology is what has made the health care system so dreadful, so bad at what it does.” – Marcia Angell, MD

“The combined profits for the ten drug companies in the [Fortune 500](#) (\$35.9 billion) were more than the profits for all the other 490

businesses put together (\$33.7 billion) [in 2002]... Over the past two decades the pharmaceutical industry has moved very far from its original high purpose of discovering and producing useful new drugs. Now primarily a marketing machine to sell drugs of dubious benefit, this industry uses its wealth and power to co-opt every institution that might stand in its way, including the US Congress, the FDA, academic medical centers, and the medical profession itself. (Most of its marketing efforts are focused on influencing doctors, since they must write the prescriptions.) If prescription drugs were like ordinary consumer goods, all this might not matter very much. But drugs are different. People depend on them for their health and even their lives. In the words of Senator Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich.), "It's not like buying a car or tennis shoes or peanut butter." People need to know that there are some checks and balances on this industry, so that its quest for profits doesn't push every other consideration aside. But there aren't such checks and balances." – Marcia Angell, MD

"Six years ago, John Ioannidis, a professor of epidemiology at the University of Ioannina School of Medicine in Greece, found that nearly half of published articles in scientific journals contained findings that were false, in the sense that independent researchers couldn't replicate them. The problem is particularly widespread in medical research, where peer-reviewed articles in medical journals can be crucial in influencing multimillion- and sometimes multibillion-dollar spending decisions. It would be surprising if conflicts of interest did not sometimes compromise editorial neutrality, and in the case of medical research, the sources of bias are obvious. Most medical journals receive half or more of their income from pharmaceutical company advertising and reprint orders, and dozens of others[journals] are owned by companies like Wolters Kluwer, a medical publisher that also provides marketing

services to the pharmaceutical industry.” — Helen Epstein, author of “Flu Warning: Beware the Drug Companies” (http://aaci-india.org/COI/Flu_web_final.pdf)

“The FDA also relies increasingly upon fees and other payments from the pharmaceutical companies whose products the agency is supposed to regulate. This could contribute to the growing number of scandals in which the dangers of widely prescribed drugs have been discovered too late. Last year, GlaxoSmithKline’s diabetes drug Avandia was linked to thousands of heart attacks, and earlier in the decade, the company’s antidepressant Paxil was discovered to exacerbate the risk of suicide in young people. Merck’s painkiller Vioxx was also linked to thousands of heart disease deaths. In each case, the scientific literature gave little hint of these dangers. The companies have agreed to pay settlements in class action lawsuits amounting to far less than the profits the drugs earned on the market. These precedents could be creating incentives for reduced vigilance concerning the side effects of prescription drugs in general.” — Helen Epstein, “Flu Warning: Beware the Drug Companies”