



Letter to the editor: The Pundit Speaks
By Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.
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"Drug Makers, Profit and Greed"

Drug makers have been guilty of egregiously sleazy practices in the past and the future bodes more of the same. Drug firms have withheld unfavorable data on profitable drugs. Drug firms have failed to timely report possible safety concerns and accurate performance data, sometimes for years. Drug names, such as Avandia, Celebrex, Zyprexa and Vioxx bring forth bad memories of sordid practices by the pharmaceutical industry. They have put out reports written by employees or paid consultants, rather than by the academic investigators named as the lead authors. All the while, The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) moves at sloth speed to correct these atrocities. Dr. Catherine DeAngelis, editor of *JAMA*, has said, "This is just the tip of the iceberg. I've been sitting in this office for eight years, watching physicians and clinical researchers be used by pharmaceutical companies in ways that can end up with patients being hurt." Nearly every single day, news reports implicating the dangers of medicines hit the airways, printed media and the internet. Complicating the matter is the unreliability of the data released by drug manufacturers and their reluctance to publish negative studies.

Drug companies may have misled patients by inadequate warnings about the risk of developing adverse reactions to even common medications. Currently, three U.S. Senators are challenging drug maker Pfizer's attempts to persuade health insurance and benefits companies to favor its cholesterol-lowering statin drug Lipitor over new generic drugs. Pfizer's patent on the cholesterol-lowering drug, Lipitor, recently expired and the company is offering large discounts to pharmacy benefit managers who block the generic competitors. Sen. Herb Kohl (D-Wis.) said, "Consumers and taxpayers foot the bill when drug benefit companies and insurers manipulate the marketplace to prevent access to generic drugs for millions of Americans." Senator Max Baucus (D-Mont.) said, "We need to take a close look to ensure we're protecting both taxpayer dollars and access to the medicine patients need." In May 2011, for the first time, UNICEF publicized what drug makers charge it for vaccines and there is a huge spread in prices. Shockingly, one dual vaccine costs UNICEF \$3.50 per shot but Americans pay between \$71 to \$114 for those same two vaccines.

In the America that I love, we do not mind drug makers making a reasonable profit but, for God's sake, stop the rip off. Also, we expect drug companies to operate with integrity and honesty. After all, we are giving their medications to our most vulnerable citizens and during life threatening illnesses. Lies and deception must stop. Profit must be secondary to patient care. We may end up being a fatality statistic as a footnote to a drug warning report that was not filed timely.

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