

# Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

By Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.

December 22, 2013

## “Drug Side Effects: The Hidden Epidemic”

Recent studies have made us aware that drug company cover-ups result annually in up to 2.7 million hospitalized Americans with serious adverse drug reactions and, of these, there are 128,000 deaths. A 2013, article entitled, *"Institutional Corruption of Pharmaceuticals and the Myth of Safe and Effective Drugs"* was published in the Journal of Law, Medicine and Ethics (JLME) and reported that patients have suffered from a largely hidden epidemic of side effects from drugs that usually have few offsetting benefits. The drug industry has demanded shorter average review times and, with less time to thoroughly review evidence, increased hospitalizations and death have resulted. Additionally, top research scientists can be financially beholden to drug companies. A doctor's code is "First, do no harm" and the vast majority strive to live up to this highly desirable goal. The Harvard authors presented evidence that the drug industry has a hidden business model to maximize profits on scores of drugs with clinically minor additional benefits. Institutional corruption consists of distorting drug efficacy facts and securing approval of medications with little advantage over older drugs, which serves their commercial interests well but does not do justice to the public. From the mid-1970s through the mid-1990s, multiple assessments have found that only 11 to 15.6% of new molecular entities (NMEs, drugs) provide an important therapeutic gain. The JLME article states, "Millions of patients benefit from the one out of six drugs that are therapeutically significant advances; but most R&D dollars are devoted to developing molecularly different but therapeutically similar drugs, which tends to involve less risk and cost for manufacturers." An analysis of data from the National Science Foundation indicates that patent-based pharmaceutical companies devote only 1.3% of revenues, net of taxpayer subsidies, to discovering new molecules. And get this, the 25% of revenues spent on promotion is about 19 times more than the amount spent on discovering new molecules. The independent drug bulletin, *La revue Prescrire*, analyzed the clinical value of every new drug product or new indication approved in France and found that about 8-12% offered therapeutic advantages and nearly twice that many (15.6%) were judged to be more harmful than beneficial. A measly 1.6% offered substantial advantages. Assessments by the Canadian advisory panel to the Patented Medicine Prices Review Board and by a Dutch general practice drug bulletin have come to similar conclusions. Curiously, no comparable review has been done in the United States. Why?

In the America that I love, we must push our legislators to hold drug companies accountable for drug safety and effectiveness. Drug companies should invest more money in development of effective new products and less money in massive television and printed media advertising, which saturate daily televised programming.

Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.

Surgeon/Scientist/Patient Advocate

27439 Highway 441, Kentwood, LA 70444

985-229-6955 Home | 985-229-3760 – Fax | 985-514-0578 – Cell



[rhowesmd@hughes.net](mailto:rhowesmd@hughes.net) |

[www.iwillfindthecure.org](http://www.iwillfindthecure.org)