Common Aims/Different Languages: Increasing Understanding Among Medical Journals, Academia, and Industry

Report of CBE Airlie House Retreat, 13-15 November 1998

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Medical journals, academics, and the pharmaceutical industry depend on each other in many ways, yet their relationship is characterized by distrust. This is reinforced when egregious behaviors occur (for example, companies suppress unfavorable findings, academics fabricate clinical data, or journal editors reject papers but steal their ideas). This retreat was not about recounting horrific tales but about trying to understand why the different constituencies act as they do and reaching agreement where possible.

The meeting was the brainchild of Leni Grossman, of Merck, who was concerned that the pharmaceutical industry was poorly represented at CBE meetings and that discussions about companies' misdemeanors were therefore one-sided. She felt that more productive communication could occur with more nearly equal representation of journals, academia, and industry and therefore, with the blessing of CBE and support from her employers, set up the meeting after initial discussions at the 1997 peer-review congress.

To get us started, Harry Marks of Johns Hopkins University gave a fascinating account of the history of pharmaceutical-industry collaboration with academia. He outlined the reasons for academics' distrust of commercial organizations and the philosophic tensions between business and medical science.

Panels from the 3 Groups

A panel from each constituency then had the floor in turn for an hour to present "the view from here". This was followed by lively general discussion.

The academics panel (David Moher, Kay Dickersin, Mildred Cho, Faith McLellan, and Laura McAuley) spoke about

- publication bias and the importance of including "gray literature" (such as abstracts and unpublished reports) in systematic reviews
- investigators' and companies' failure to publish negative findings
- companies' attempts to suppress publications
- the need for clinical-trial registers
- authors' poor understanding of peer-review publications
- pressures on academics to secure commercial funding
- difficulties in applying International Committee of Medical Journal Editors authorship criteria

- variations between institutions in dealing with ethical issues

The pharmaceutical industry was represented by Silvia Bonaccorso (Merck), Evan Norris (Pfizer), Donna Curtis (Zeneca), Julia Earnshaw (Glaxo-Wellcome), and Liz Wager (Janssen-Cilag). This panel presented an overview of how companies decide what research to do and what to publish, how this research and writing are organized, experience in working with journals, and the effects of evidence-based medicine on publication policies.

The editors panel comprised Roy Pitkin (Obstetrics & Gynecology), Frank Davidoff (Annals of Internal Medicine), Bob Utiger (New England Journal of Medicine), Richard Horton (The Lancet), and Drummond Rennie (Journal of the American Medical Association). It outlined

- reactions to criticisms about the slowness of the peer-review process
- difficulties with sponsored supplements and pharmaceutical advertising
- industry's failure to respond to global medical issues
- conflict of interest among reviewers and editors

Subjects of General Consensus

It would take the whole of CBE Views to do justice to the thoughtful, passionate, yet good-humored discussions that erupted after each presentation and spilled over to the dinner table and bar. Although 48 hours was enough only to scratch the surface, the meeting was characterized by an openness to learning about the arcane mysteries of the other constituencies, which is surely a first step to communication. I hope participants with minority views will forgive me if, in the spirit of the meeting, I try to outline some broad agreement.

- Journals, academia, and industry contain individuals who display the full range of human virtues and vices. It is therefore unhelpful to label people or judge them by their jobs, but more constructive to address their specific behaviors.
- Industry shares many interests with journals and academia, but its primary aims are not the same. Commercial companies exist primarily to make money, but they do this by developing new medicines which often benefit patients.

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- Doctors and scientists working within industry have not abandoned their professional principles and want to be judged by their individual record and not tarred with the brush of other people's (or companies') misdemeanors.
- Nonpublication of negative findings (findings that fail to reach statistical significance or are unfavorable to a company's or academic's theories) has many causes. This bias might be overcome by the existence of clinical-trial registers, policies of access to unpublished data from both companies and academic institutions, or improved mechanisms for making such data accessible (for example, special Web sites). Academics and editors felt that companies had an ethical imperative to publish all clinical trials, but most companies still take a proprietary view of data generated in their studies.
- Ideally, investigators write research publications themselves, but they often fail to publish routine studies that were performed to meet regulatory requirements. Companies therefore use medical writers to improve the timeliness and quality of manuscripts. Many editors and academics accepted that professional writers can have a legitimate role in preparing such papers but urged that their involvement be transparent and their funding acknowledged. The ghostwriting of opinion pieces such as editorials was condemned, although assistance with language or style (for example, for non-native English-speakers) was thought acceptable. The named authors (or contributors) should be responsible for a paper's content. Methods and results can often be generated from the protocol and predefined statistical tables, but medical writers should only draft discussion sections based on outlines provided by the investigators or generated after contact with them. If professional writers work on a publication, the investigators should be involved at all stages.
- Providing information about individuals' contributions to studies might flush out guest authors, identify ghosts who made a substantial contribution but do not meet strictly defined authorship criteria (or are omitted for less benign reasons), and describe the contributions of professional writers. Academic institutions need to address their system for awards and promotion to encourage more honest authorship practices.

Toward *Convivencia*

With my head still buzzing from such stimulating discussion, I stayed awake during much of the flight home and had plenty of time to read an improving tome on European history. In it, I came across the Spanish word convivencia, meaning "a mutual, practical and social tolerance of one another's ways by people of different . . . communities living side by side". This term seems to sum up the meeting's aims and sounded sufficiently close to conviviality to convey its atmosphere as well. Thanks to Leni and the remarkable atmosphere of Airlie House, we have taken the first steps toward convivencia between editors, academics, and the pharmaceutical industry.

Those who attended the retreat will, I am sure, have gained new insights and made new friends. Those who wish to continue its work will have an opportunity at the 1999 CBE meeting. I hope that anyone from the pharmaceutical industry who is interested in working with a small group to develop publication guidelines that arose from our discussions will let me know (lwager@jacgb.jnj.com).