

impression that the whole thing was in fact engineered by a pharmaceutical company.

The whole issue of manipulation of the medical literature by the pharmaceutical industry is now very well recognized, and most journals put in place extensive controls in an attempt to avoid such abuse. As a reader I would expect 1) an explicit declaration of the relationship of each author to the pharmaceutical industry, 2) an explicit declaration of the contribution of each author to the text (Was this article ghost-written by RT Communications?), and 3) if the journal's editors are going to accept references to shadowy agencies as "disclosure," I would suggest that they have an obligation to include a note explaining their nature. In this instance, not one of these conditions has been met, and I am left with the strong suspicion that this review might not be quite as objective in its conclusions as it appears. I would suggest that a critical function of an editor is the preservation of the reputation of the journal as a source of credible information, free of outside influence and bias. The extensive statements of relationships with potential sources of bias now required by most journals have been put in place for precisely this reason. I would suggest that *Canadian Family Physician* has failed in this regard.

—David Maxwell MD CCFP(EM)
Middle Lahave, NS
by mail

Reference

1. Schmelzle J, Birtwhistle RV, Tan AKW. Acute otitis media in children with tympanostomy tubes. *Can Fam Physician* 2008;54:1123-7.

Editor's response

I agree with Dr Maxwell that the article on acute otitis media in children with tympanostomy tubes by Schmelzle et al should have included more information about the involvement of RT Communications in the development of this article to allow the reader to make an informed decision about the credibility of the article.

The Centre for Studies in Primary Care at Queen's University has a contractual relationship with RT

Communications for the development of evidence-based reviews on a variety of topics. This agreement included completing a report on the current evidence and developing several critically appraised topics, case studies, and a clinical decision tool on the topics of otitis media and otitis externa. RT Communications' client was Alcon, makers of ophthalmologic and otic preparations. However, RT Communications and Alcon had no involvement in writing this paper, including setting the topic, writing any part of it, or rights of approval. RT Communications was notified of this paper after its acceptance for publication. None of the authors have or had any relationships with any pharmaceutical companies that have products discussed in the paper.

Since 2003, *Canadian Family Physician* has published a declaration of author contribution for research articles. Competing interest statements have been published since 2002 and are required for all articles. Articles published in the College section written by College staff are excluded from this requirement, unless there is a competing interest beyond the author's role at The College of Family Physicians of Canada.

—Diane Kelsall MD MEd CCFP FCFP
Editor, Canadian Family Physician

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