

Relevant to the office and ED

As a CCFP(EM) practising full-time urban emergency medicine and part-time occupational medicine, I have had difficulty relating to most of the content in *Canadian Family Physician* over the past 10 years.

I was happily surprised to open the October 2011 issue to find articles on treatment of moderate pediatric asthma exacerbation, hypertensive emergencies in the emergency department, spirometry interpretation, and herpes zoster during pregnancy.

Most Canadian emergency departments are staffed by physicians first trained as family physicians, whether they hold the CCFP(EM) designation or not. I imagine that a large proportion of your membership has at least some interest in acute care in addition to office medicine. I welcome more articles in the Motherisk and Emergency Files sections, and more content which is relevant to both office and emergency department practice.

Thank you for making the October 2011 issue relevant to my Canadian family physician practice.

—Brent Crawford MD CCFP(EM)
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Competing interests
None declared

Industry-funded papers

In my reading of the literature, I dutifully try to critically appraise the data presented, as encouraged in recent decades. Upon reading the excellent review of the benefits of herpes zoster vaccination by Shapiro et al¹ (an article blessed with the imprimatur of the College as being eligible for Mainpro M1 credits), I was seized with an angst, the resolution of which escapes me. The authors' credentials are impeccable—I have no reason to doubt their statement of a lack of competing interests—but then they acknowledge that they received funding from the manufacturer of the vaccine. Precisely what this funding was for is unstated, but it is not unreasonable to infer that it was provided as recompense for writing the article in question, a conclusion which immediately calls into question the authors' objectivity and lack of bias. Note that I am not in any way whatsoever impugning the honesty of these particular authors; rather the issue is the much broader question of what we are to make of industry-funded literature in our critical appraisal process. It is obvious that it introduces a considerable bias, but at the same time this does not de facto translate into lack of validity. In addition it raises considerable issues for journal editors—to what extent does the publication of such literature constitute complicity in covert advertising? And, beyond this, when the College accords the article in question M1 credits, adding a virtual imperative to read and absorb the content of the article, how are we to evaluate this?

—David Maxwell MD CCFP(EM)
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Competing interests
None declared

Reference
1. Shapiro M, Kvern B, Watson P, Guenther L, McElhaney J, McGeer A. Update on herpes zoster vaccination. A family practitioner's guide. *Can Fam Physician* 2011;57:1127-31 (Eng), e356-62 (Fr).

Editor's response

The editors are grateful for Dr Maxwell's feedback and reflections on the difficulty of critically evaluating medical journal publications that have funding from industry.

In critically evaluating publications it is important to take many factors into account—the clinical relevance and importance of the work, the applicability to one's practice, the quality and rigour of the methods used (in this case of the literature review and synthesis), and the reputations of the authors, as Dr Maxwell has alluded to.

While it is the responsibility of readers to apply critical appraisal skills to their reading, it is also the responsibility of authors to fully declare all potential competing interests that could affect the interpretation of their work; and it is the responsibility of medical journals to ensure that such competing interests are fully divulged. Dr Shapiro and her colleagues did declare that the work was financially supported by SIGMA Canadian Menopause Society through an unrestricted educational grant provided by Merck.¹ However, the editors agree with Dr Maxwell's concerns and think that a more complete statement of the authors' potential competing interests and relationships with industry would have helped readers to evaluate the work more critically. We will incorporate his feedback in reviewing and publishing future work that has industry support.

—Nicholas Pimlott MD CCFP
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Reference

1. Shapiro M, Kvern B, Watson P, Guenther L, McElhaney J, McGeer A. Update on herpes zoster vaccination. A family practitioner's guide. *Can Fam Physician* 2011;57:1127-31 (Eng), e356-62 (Fr).

The top 5 articles read online at cfp.ca

- 1. Clinical Review:** Update on herpes zoster vaccination. *A family practitioner's guide* (October 2011)
- 2. Clinical Review:** Zopiclone. *Is it a pharmacologic agent for abuse?* (December 2007)
- 3. Emergency Files:** Managing hypertensive emergencies in the ED (October 2011)
- 4. Case Report:** Chronic vulvar irritation: could toilet paper be the culprit? (April 2010)
- 5. Clinical Review:** Exercise and knee osteoarthritis: benefit or hazard? (September 2009)