

The Truth  *About Health*

Drug Testing Today: A Broken System!

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In the olden days – just 20 years back – tests on new drugs were conducted by academic institutions with limited or no financial ties to drug manufacturers. The academics were given total responsibility for the investigation. The professors designed the studies, tested the products and published the results as they saw fit. That was just 2 decades ago.

Well, gone are the good old days when the majority of testing was done by professionals who put the interests of healthy consumers above personal or institutional gain. In these days of high stakes pharmaceutical profits, truth in testing has pretty much gone down the tubes.

The way things work now is that sponsoring drug companies have become intimately involved in all aspects of the research and testing of their products. They often design the studies, perform the analysis, write the papers and decide when and in what form to publish the results. Sometimes, study authors may not even have access to their own data. According to a trade organization known as the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America, the industry is justified in withholding this data. “As owners of the study database, sponsors have discretion to determine who will have access to the database.”

Also in the past 20 years, a for-profit research industry has sprung up that vies for pharmaceutical testing contracts. These companies are called Contract Research Organizations (CROs). Frequently they provide patients for the studies, engage in research activities, and serve as stiff competition to academic medical testing centers. In fact, sometimes institutions are forced to accept drug company terms of working in cooperation with CROs, something that would have been unthinkable in the not too distant past.

Twenty years back, an institution would only have received a grant to do the research. Now, however, institutions and faculty frequently have financial ties to the sponsoring industry. Some serve as speakers, advisory board members or consultants and may even have equity interests in the drug company. One recent study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* found that two-thirds of testing institutions had an equity interest in a sponsoring company, and two-thirds of department chairpersons were found to receive departmental income from drug companies and three-fifths also received personal income.

Regardless of test results provided by institutions, drug companies are becoming notorious for publishing only positive results or for putting a spin toward the positive on results considered unfavorable. One study of test results publically presented in the *New England Journal of Medicine* illustrated how results were distributed on 74 clinical trials of an antidepressant. In this case, 37 of 38 positive tests were published. Of the 36 negative tests, 33 were either not published or presented in a way that conveyed a positive outcome.

What is most concerning is that this type of testing and presentation of results also has great influence on the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approval process. And, of more

concern still is that the influence of the sponsoring organization does not stop at the door of the FDA. One study published in Nature showed that one-third of the members of the FDA approval panels also had financial interests in drug companies!

Given this type of control by drug companies and the possible corruption that enters the process at every level, what is a person to do? Certainly the best solution is the drug-free lifestyle that is available through Chiropractic or Acupuncture care with a focus on wellness, exercise and healthy living. Drugs are not the answer, now even more so with the state of product testing in total disrepair.

Source: The Journal of the American Medical Association. "Industry-Sponsored Clinical Research: A Broken System." September 2008. Used by Permission.