

The Truth  *About Health*

Federal Drug Safety Doctor on Pharma Payroll

Volume 12 Issue 57

Three Harvard University doctors have been caught in a failure to report over \$3 million in income that they receive from drug companies. One of the men was very involved in research that has led to a huge boom for drug companies in dishing out antipsychotic drugs to children. The information was entered into the US Congressional Record following an extensive investigation by Senator Charles E. Grassley of Iowa.

Dr. Joseph Biederman of the Harvard Psychiatry Department has been known to be very involved in research with powerful antipsychotic medicines. According to Senator Grassley's report, Dr. Biederman has taken and failed to properly report at least \$1.6 million in drug company income. The payments were received between the years 2000 and 2007. During this time, the doctor failed to follow the proper reporting procedures as set out by the university regarding payments from drug companies.

Dr. Timothy E. Wilens of the Harvard Medical School is a second person cited by Senator Grassley as circumventing the reporting system. His unreported income is also in the area of \$1.6 million. A third colleague of the two doctors, Dr. Thomas Spencer, has unreported income of over \$1 million.

In beginning the investigation, Senator Grassley said he had asked to see the report forms the doctors had presented to the University regarding drug company payments. He said the forms were a mess and his staff had a hard time even reading them. That's when he asked the University to have a second look at the monies received from drug companies, and this is when things got interesting, he said. This is when Drs. Biederman and Wilens belatedly disclosed their \$1.6 million each, and Dr. Spencer admitted to over \$1 million.

Speaking to the Congressional Record, Sen. Grassley said, "What makes all of this even more interesting is that Drs. Biederman and Wilens were awarded grants from the National Institutes of Health to study the drug Strattera®. Obviously, if a researcher is taking money from a drug company while also receiving Federal dollars to research that company's product, then there is a conflict of interest. That is why I am asking the National Institutes of Health to take a closer look at the grants they give to researchers."

Senators Grassley and Herb Kohl of Wisconsin are co-sponsors of the Physician Payments Sunshine Act, a bill introduced into Congress in September 2007. The aim of the bill is to provide for transparency in relationships between physicians and drug manufacturers for which payments are made under government programs. It is aimed at doctors and drug companies making honest disclosures and discovering when conflicts of interest exist. The bill is currently being considered by the Senate Finance Committee.

In the meantime, Sen. Grassley's investigators continue to look into matters such as this one at Harvard. Likely what they are discovering is only the tip of the iceberg in terms of payments made, received and hidden from view.

Source: GovTrack.US. "Payments to Physicians. The United States Senate." June 2008.

<http://www.govtrack.us/congress/record.xpd?id=110-s20080604-26&person=300048>