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Sponsoring by the Pharmaceutical Industry Can Bias the Results of Drug Studies, Study Suggests

Drug studies financed by pharmaceutical companies frequently show positive results in favour of the sponsor.

In the current issue of Deutsches Ärzteblatt International (Dtsch Arztebl Int 2010; 107(16): 279-85), a research group headed by the Chairman of the Drug Commission of the German Medical Association, Prof. Wolf-Dieter Ludwig, describes the influence of sponsoring on the results, protocol and quality of drugs studies.

The authors conclude that pharmaceutical companies exploit a wide variety of possibilities of manipulating study results. Apart from financing the study, financial links to the authors, such as payments for lectures, may tend to make the results of the study more favourable for the company. Not only the results themselves, but also their interpretation, are significantly more often in accordance

with the wishes of the sponsor.

In some publications, the authors detected evidence that sponsors from the pharmaceutical industry had influenced study protocols. For example, placebos were more frequently used in drug studies than was the case with independently financed studies. On the other hand, some favourable effects were linked to financial support from the pharmaceutical industry. The methodological quality of studies with industrial support tended to be better than with independent drug studies.

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