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Dept of Psychiatry,
Bangor, Wales.
November 7th

Ellen Trane Nørby
Minister of Health
Denmark

Re Peter Gøtzsche – Nordic Cochrane Centre - Rigshospitalet

Dear Minister:

Yesterday you received a letter from 3500 medical researchers expressing their concern at a possible dismissal of Peter Gøtzsche from the Rigshospitalet. The letter referred to Dr Gøtzsche's considerable scientific achievements as well as his leadership of global efforts to bring transparency to clinical study data – something that is critical for patients and doctors and for pharmaceutical price control.

As someone who was in the same position as Dr Gøtzsche, I am one of the few signatories who can speak to another set of issues – the consequences of any dismissal or even the suspension that has happened. In 2000, I was dismissed by the University of Toronto having given a lecture about clinical trial data transparency linked to the hazards of suicidality on the antidepressant group of drugs.

The result was an international event that did more to make a wider constituency aware of the hazards that had concerned me and others for a decade than anything else ever did. Two years later, these drugs had been banned in minors and carried Black Box Warnings.

The furore put the issue of transparency of clinical trial data firmly on the map and has recruited others to the cause, as will any move against Peter Gøtzsche.

The pressure to dismiss me didn't come from the pharmaceutical industry as most outsiders thought. Company marketing departments rarely want to make a martyr of someone. The problem comes from people in the middle, Deputy Chief Executives like Per Joergensen, who miss the bigger picture and can't imagine that clamping down on any hints of concerns might make the problem bigger rather than cause it to go away.

The reputation of the institution that dismissed me ended up, as a result, more sullied than mine.

I (and I expect others) have already provided Dr Gøtzsche with evidence to support a legal action he intends to take against Cochrane. His current suspension will further strengthen his case and will likely bring the chain of decision making behind his suspension into play.

I attach with this letter an article of mine covering some of the linked issues. I have had several requests from other journals for more detailed accounts of the issues, focusing more specifically on Dr Gøtzsche and his position in Cochrane and Copenhagen.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "David Healy". The signature is written in black ink on a white background.

Professor David Healy MD FRCPsych



November 16, 2018

Ellen Trane Nørby
Minister of Health
Denmark

Re Peter Gøtzsche – Nordic Cochrane Centre - Rigshospitalet

Dear Minister

I write this letter to express my unconditional support for maintaining Professor Peter Gøtzsche as chief physician at the Nordic Cochrane Centre in the Rigshospitalet, which I am aware that Cochrane rules allow even though he is no longer a member of Cochrane. I am a tenured professor at Stanford University and the current rate of citations of my work in the scientific literature (>3,000 times per month) is the highest among all physicians in the world and among the 10 highest across all scientists in the world. I have unconditional admiration for Peter Gøtzsche. Peter is undoubtedly a giant, one of the greatest scientists of our times and one of the most influential, impactful, and useful voices in medicine at large. I cherish enormously his contributions. I believe he is the most recognizable and prominent scientist that Denmark currently has. His dismissal from the Cochrane board two months ago came as a total shock to me. The possibility of compounding this shock with his dismissal also from the Rigshospitalet would deal a severe blow to medicine, democracy, freedom of thought, and justice.

I do not agree with Peter Gøtzsche on everything that he says and publishes. I have found myself several times on the opposite side of multiple arguments. However, I believe that basic respect for scientific discourse requires that you do not eliminate your opponents through administrative machinations. Ousting Peter from the Rigshospitalet damages the reputation of Denmark as a free country. Conversely, supporting him will demonstrate forcefully that not all is lost for human dignity.

I trust that you will decide not to be on the wrong side of history and that you will take pride that your ministry continues to support one of the greatest investigators of our times.

Sincerely,

John P.A. Ioannidis, MD, DSc
C.F. Rehnberg Professor in Disease Prevention
Professor of Medicine, of Health Research and Policy, and (by courtesy) of Biomedical Data Science
Stanford University School of Medicine
Professor (by courtesy) of Statistics
Stanford University School of Humanities and Sciences
Co-Director, Meta-Research Innovation Center at Stanford (METRICS)
Director, PhD Program in epidemiology and clinical research



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December 5, 2018

Ellen Trane Norby
Minister of Health
Denmark

Re: Peter Gotzsche – Nordic Cochrane Centre – Rigshospitalet

Dear Minister:

I am a Clinical Pharmacologist, Internist and tenured Professor at the University of BC and have followed the career of Peter for many years. It is only with many years of experience that one can come to appreciate the immense biases that direct and manipulate the practice of Medicine. As a result of those biases, at the present time we do not know whether the benefits of daily drug therapy or diagnostic tests outweigh the harms in many clinical settings. Peter has been a leader in identifying the settings where the harms of interventions outweigh the benefits. As such he has benefitted hundreds of thousands of patients worldwide with his work on mammography screening and more recently on the overuse of psychiatric drugs. As a result of his effectiveness he has come under criticism from the health professionals and companies who are making money from the procedures and treatments that he is critical of. I also regularly am criticized and attacked by physicians who think they know better, but do not realize the degree that their thinking is manipulated by vested interests whose sole goal is to maintain their profits. Unfortunately, this is the health care world that we currently live in.

I was devastated to learn a few months ago that these vested interests are now impacting the Cochrane Collaboration. The evidence for this is the expulsion of Peter from the Governing Board and the attempts to dismiss him as Director of the Nordic Cochrane Centre and from the Rigshospitalet. Further evidence is that Cochrane is also defending its policy of allowing individuals with a Financial Conflict of Interest to author Cochrane reviews. That is something Peter fought against and why we need Peter and others going forward to ensure that the policy is reversed. I believe that the majority of members of the Cochrane are against that policy.

I hope that you can appreciate that it is the patients and public of Denmark and the rest of the world who are going to be harmed as a result of the dismissal of Peter. At the present time independent, non-conflicted investigators looking at evidence for health care interventions are few and far between. The Therapeutics Initiative has been successful in maintaining its complete independence from financial interests for 25 years. Please visit our site to see what we do. www.ti.ubc.ca.

Peter is a prominent leader who has dedicated his career to helping patients. The world cannot afford to lose Peter. I am hopeful that you can help to ensure that Peter is reinstated in all his former positions.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Wright', written in a cursive style.

James M Wright MD, PhD, FRCP(C)
Co-Managing Director
Therapeutics Initiative
Editor-in-Chief
Therapeutics Letter
Coordinating Editor
Cochrane Hypertension Group

Rigshospitalets Direktion
Att. Vicedirektør Per Erik Jørgensen

København, den 8.12.18

Vedrørende Peter Gøtzsches tilknytning til Det Nordiske Cochrane Center

Kære Per Erik Jørgensen

I anledning af jeres fritstilling af min kollega, Peter Gøtzsche, leder af Det Nordiske Cochrane Center, vil jeg gerne hermed opfordre jer til at trække denne fritstilling tilbage og acceptere hans uændrede ansættelse i centeret.

Når jeg er foranlediget til at skrive til jer om dette, har det baggrund i mit eget faglige virke. Jeg var statslig forskningsprofessor 1989-94 og derefter overlæge ved KS-H:S-Region H og professor ved KU 1994-2007 i faget klinisk epidemiologi, der essentielt handler om metoderne til studie af patienternes prognose og mulighederne for forbedring af den, og som derfor er en central disciplin i Cochrane analyserne. Som Dekan var jeg i 1995 med til at stifte organisationen 'Københavns Universitetshospital' sammen med daværende H:S Direktør, Erik Juhl, og var dens første formand, med det overordnede formål at fremme samarbejdet mellem hospitalerne og det Sundhedsvidenskabelige Fakultet ved Københavns Universitet, bla. i forskning og uddannelse i evidensskabelsen.

Sammen med Peter Gøtzsche var jeg med til at tage initiativ til dannelse af Cochrane centeret i et møde med Cochrane organisationens britiske, amerikanske og canadiske fædre og daværende leder, Ian Chalmers, ved et møde, som jeg var vært for i det institut, jeg var ny leder af på Kommunehospitalet. Initiativet var et meget vigtigt skridt i styrkelsen af den kliniske epidemiologi her i landet og lå i logisk forlængelse af et forudgående initiativ til etablering af Copenhagen Trial Unit i samme institut.

På baggrund af Peter Gøtzsches mangeårige og fortsatte indsats på dette fagområde, vil det uden for al tvivl være et stort tab at afskedige ham på baggrund af den aktuelle konflikt i det internationale Cochrane samarbejde. Ud over fravær af hans fremtidige konkrete, højt kvalificerede og internationalt anerkendte faglige arbejdsindsats, vil en afskedigelse på det foreliggende usaglige grundlag også foranledige et dybt og utvivlsomt meget vanskeligt genopretteligt fald i ansættelsesmyndighedens anseelse både her i landet og i udlandet.

Som jeg har forstået den igangværende konflikt mellem Peter Gøtzsche og den nuværende ledelse af Cochrane organisationen, så bunder den essentielt i uenighed om, hvordan man bedst opfylder formålet med dette samarbejde. Peter Gøtzsche har insisteret på, at den helt nødvendige uafhængighed af andre irrelevante interesser, kommercielle som non-kommercielle, skal fastholdes i arbejdet med vurdering af evidensen for hvad der alt i alt gavner nuværende og mulige kommende patienter bedst, dvs. giver dem den bedste prognose. Det fremgår af det foreliggende at den nuværende ledelse af organisationen helt uacceptabelt har været villig til at give køb på dette princip.

Jeg støtter fuldt ud kravet om uafhængighed og uhildethed i dette arbejde, som jo sådan set blot er ufravigelig implementering af forvaltningslovens principper om habilitet i vurdering og behandling af en given sag, her vedrørende patienternes ve og vel, liv eller død. Den endelige konklusion af en vurdering af hvad, der er bedst at gøre for patienterne, må ikke være belastet af muligheden for at være påvirket af interessekonflikter. Foreligger der sådanne muligheder fordufter konklusionernes troværdighed, og så bliver de reelt nytteløse.

På faglige områder, hvor der skal foretages kvalificerede skøn, fordi evidensen ikke er tilstrækkeligt udviklet, opstår selvfølgelig uenigheder, ligesom der meget vel kan være uenighed om, hvordan resultaterne af arbejdet med evidensskabelse og det uomgængelige skøn formidles og implementeres. Det har der som bekendt også været i anledning af Peter Gøtzsches arbejde, men at det har kunnet finde sted, er udtryk for et nødvendigt vilkår for dette arbejde, som består i den store positive og konstruktive værdi, der altid er i frihed til diversitet, debat og dialog.

Jeg har kendt og fulgt Peter Gøtzsches arbejde med udvikling af den uhyre værdifulde dybt analytisk-kritiske vurdering af evidens lige fra før han blev læge, og har været imponeret over hans fortsatte bidrag indtil nu. Det har selvfølgelig glædet mig at se at der er massiv international opbakning til ham fra kolleger med den højeste faglige kompetence på basis af utvetydig anerkendelse af hans indsats i Cochrane samarbejdet.

Det bør være muligt at finde en fremkommelig løsning, der ikke indebærer afskedigelse af Peter Gøtzsche, således at den klare og stærke stemme, han har til patienternes bedste, kan fastholdes.

Med venlig hilsen



Thorkild I.A. Sørensen,
Professor, Dr.med.
E-mail tias@sund.ku.dk
Mobil telefon 93565934

Kopi sendt til Sundhedsminister Ellen Trane Nørby, da jeg har forstået at det Nordiske Cochrane Center baseres på en særbevilling til Rigshospitalet fra Sundhedsministeriet.



To Miss Ellen Trane Nørby
Minister of Health Denmark

Utrecht 21 December 2018

Dear Minister Nørby,

www.isdbweb.org

The Committee

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The International Society of Drug Bulletins* writes to you to express our deep concern with the way professor Peter Gøtzsche is dealt with in Denmark and his upcoming dismissal from the Rigshospitalet. Peter Gøtzsche is one of the leading scientists in medicine. He has contributed through many articles, books, lectures and interviews to the awareness of sound methodological rigor in medical science. This achievement is acknowledged worldwide also by his opponents.

Science and medicine have evolved and changed enormously in the past decades as the result of ongoing scientific debate in which advocates and opponents 'struggle' and try to convince each other. It is necessary that scientific debate evolves in freedom and that there is sufficient space for all to contribute to the discussions.

Drugs play a major role in medicine and the revolution that has taken place in the past century has given us quite a few life-saving drugs. Yet, there is a growing gap between doing science and doing business. It is well known that researchers with conflicts of interest judge more positively about drug therapies than researchers without such ties. Peter Gøtzsche has shown in his work that there are many flaws in the way scientific studies are presented in the medical literature and in the media. This knowledge saved many lives as well as it reduced costs in health care.

The Portuguese-Dutch philosopher Baruch de Spinoza finished his *Ethics* with the words: 'All excellence is difficult just like it is rare'. We believe as well as many others that we should be proud of the excellent achievements of Peter Gøtzsche. We urgently request you to reconsider the expulsion of Peter Gøtzsche from the Rigshospitalet.

For the ISDB Committee

Dick Bijl, president of the International Society of Drug Bulletins

* The International Society of Drug Bulletins (ISDB) is a worldwide network of bulletins and journals on drugs and therapeutics that are financially and intellectually independent of the pharmaceutical industry, ISDB was raised by the World Health Organisation and the European Community.