

## Gøtzsche PC. Cochrane authors on drug industry payroll should not be allowed.

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Cochrane reviews should be conducted by people that do not have financial conflicts of interest.<sup>1</sup> Allowing almost half of the authors to receive financial support from the company whose product is being reviewed does not boost people's confidence in Cochrane's motto, "trusted evidence."

The Cochrane review of the HPV vaccines from May 2018 is illustrative.<sup>2</sup> Cochrane accepted that far more than half of the authors on the protocol for the review had drug industry ties. Most were removed after outsiders had protested.<sup>2</sup>

The lead author of the review, Marc Arbyn, has several financial ties to the vaccine manufacturers, which he failed to declare.<sup>3</sup> As this is not allowed, we complained about it. The funding arbiters resolved that Arbyn had not breached the policy because he had not "gained personal financial benefit" and because the support was provided through institutions.<sup>4</sup> Tom Jefferson noted that, "the cash comes from sponsors even if it is routed through the North Pole [Santa Claus] and Mother Teresa of Calcutta."<sup>4</sup>

If we don't trust guidelines authored by people with financial conflicts of interest, why would we then trust Cochrane reviews authored by such people?

As a member of the Cochrane Governing Board, I suggested that no authors of Cochrane reviews can have financial ties to the manufacturers. My proposal was supported by the Board, and I immediately rewrote the policy, but after a year, no progress had been made.

*BMJ's* Editor in Chief wrote that it would mean fewer but better systematic reviews, and that Cochrane should be committed to holding industry and academia to account.<sup>5</sup> She also wrote that the Board's vote to expel one of its founders and most vocal internal critics (me) "brings to a head years of growing tension between the collaboration's radical academic roots and its more recent corporate identity," which reflects "a deep seated difference of opinion about how close to industry is too close."

Although the Governing Board denies it, leaked recordings have shown that my expulsion was related to our well-founded criticism<sup>3</sup> of the prestigious Cochrane HPV vaccine review.<sup>6</sup>

### References

1 Cochrane Collaboration policy on commercial sponsorship of Cochrane reviews and Cochrane groups. 2014; 8 March. <http://community.cochrane.org/organisational-policy-manual/appendix-5-commercial-sponsorship-policy>.

2 Arbyn M, Xu L, Simoens C, Martin-Hirsch PP. Prophylactic vaccination against human papillomaviruses to prevent cervical cancer and its precursors. *Cochrane Database Syst Rev* 2018;5:CD009069.

3 Jørgensen L, Gøtzsche PC, Jefferson T. The Cochrane HPV vaccine review was incomplete and ignored important evidence of bias: Response to the Cochrane editors. 2018; 17 September. <https://ebm.bmj.com/content/early/2018/07/27/bmjebm-2018-111012.responses#the-cochrane-hpvvaccine-review-was-incomplete-and-ignored-important-evidence-of-bias-response-to-the-cochraneeditors>.

4 Hawkes N. Lead author of Cochrane HPV review did not breach conflicts policy, find arbiters. *BMJ* 2018; 363:k4352.

5 Godlee F. Reinvigorating Cochrane. *BMJ* 2018;362:k3966.

6 Gøtzsche PC. *Death of a whistleblower and Cochrane's moral downfall*. Copenhagen: People's Press; 2019.