

Newsletter 46 Medical Advice and Drug Promotion in Australia

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Australians today are being told that health information should only be provided by medical practitioners and I have noticed that the media is using this statement to imply that because I am enrolled in an "Arts" PhD that the science I am providing is somehow less valid. In fact my background is in science. I have a Bachelor of Science and a Master of Science completed in the Faculty of Health and Behavioural Sciences at UOW in 2007. When I requested that I continue my research with a PhD at UOW I was advised that the topic was too political and I would have to complete it in the field of Science and Technology Studies (STS). Hence I am currently completing this research in medical politics in the School of Humanities and Social Inquiry. This School is located in the Faculty of Law, Humanities and Arts at UOW. My research examines the politics and ethics of scientific issues in society hence it is very relevant to vaccination policies which are a medical intervention for healthy people.

The suggestion that Australians should get their health advice only from medical professionals is a problem in our society because pharmaceutical companies are involved in the education of medical practitioners. Industry influences every part of medical research as well as the education of doctors through its sponsorship of clinical trials and professional conferences for the accreditation of practitioners (Stamatakis 2013). An example is provided by investigating the accreditation of doctor's in the US.

A doctor's education in the US is controlled by the Accreditation Council of Continuing Medical Education (ACCME). This board accredits companies to participate in the education of medical professionals. Pharmaceutical companies fund 60% of doctor's education and ACCME have accredited over 100 for-profit companies that are hired by pharmaceutical companies to provide education to doctors (Marcia Angell MD, ex-editor of the New England Journal of Medicine for 20 years). This information is not impartial because it is provided by companies employed by the drug companies. In addition, more than half of the ACCME board are employed by pharmaceutical companies. Conflicts of interest are rife in doctor's education and in the policy-making boards of governments. Whilst COI do not necessarily represent a bias it is important that they are presented in a transparent manner

to the consumers. There are many potential conflicts of interest in advisory boards in Australia but the Australian government does not ensure that these are transparent to the public. Information on COI in Australia is presented on this link

<http://vaccinationdecisions.net/immunisation-policy/>

Some of the declared conflicts of interest in Australian vaccination policy advisory boards include the chairman of the board, Professor Terry Nolan, and Professor Robert Booy, the co-director of the government immunisation surveillance unit (NCIRS).

Further information about the biased science being used in medical education can be found here <http://vaccinationdecisions.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Submission-to-the-Senate-Inquiry-on-the-Human-Rights-and-Anti-Discrimination-Acts-November-2012-141021.pdf>

This is not a "conspiracy theory" as the media is trying to label it. The issue is about balanced science being used in public health policy. The Australian media has stated they will not publish information on health if it is not presented by a "medical practitioner."

These statements can be viewed on my website here

<http://vaccinationdecisions.net/media-comments/>

This information demonstrates that Australians are not receiving balanced information on health issues from the Australian media and this is extremely important when the government has included an increasing number of vaccines in a public health policy - for the whole population. This policy is not for sick people hence it is important that the government is not using financial incentives to promote drugs to healthy people in this policy. If doctor's education cannot be demonstrated to be unbiased then this emphasises the need for all stakeholders - consumers, doctors, government, and industry - to be equally represented in health decisions. This is because different stakeholders have a different interest in government policies - financial interests, status, or health. Consumers must be equally represented to ensure the public interest is upheld.

For evidence of the pharmaceutically funded and designed promotional campaign for HPV vaccines visit <http://www.hormonesmatter.com/pharma-funded-promotion-hpv-vaccines/>

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