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## **TOUGHER REGULATION NEEDED FOR DRUG INDUSTRY**

The edition of JAMA, the largest circulation medical journal, released yesterday afternoon included two articles that highlight the grave problems with the profit motive in health care.

Both articles were based on documents made public during litigation against one of the largest drug manufacturers, Merck & Co Inc. The first article documented Merck's extensive practice of using ghost written articles. Merck would hire writers to produce articles favorable to their product. They would then recruit prestigious academics, and pay them to put their names on the paper, often as first or second authors. The true writer's name would not appear or be acknowledged.

The second article revealed how Merck had suppressed results that showed an increased death rate with use of one of their drugs in patients with Alzheimer's disease.

"These are the latest in a series of revelations of how the pharmaceutical industry's focus on profit works against the public interest," said MRG spokesperson Ahmed Bayoumi. "Of all the problem practices, the worst is the suppression or distortion of evidence. The industry hides adverse effects of their drugs, and releases information to make drugs appear better than they actually are."

One recent revelation demonstrated how the industry selectively released studies looking at the effectiveness of antidepressants to make their beneficial effects appear much greater than the true effect. Another showed how the industry suppressed results to hide increased suicide rates in adolescents given antidepressant drugs.

"Let's be clear," said another MRG spokesperson, Dr. Shelley Sender. "The problem isn't the evil pharmaceutical industry. They are behaving as one would expect given their primary goal, which is to maximize profits for their shareholders. The problem is how the profit motive plays out in health care."

"The only solution is tougher regulation of the industry," Dr. Bayoumi concluded. "The rules have to change: we need legislation that requires industry to make public the results of all their studies. There is also a deeper message: when we can keep the profit motive out of health care, we must do so. Our patients' well-being demands it."

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