

## CORRESPONDENCE

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### HEAL THY SELF PHYSICIAN

Dear Editor,

Once there was a Physician who made a pact with the devil. Devil caused him to give-in to one impulse after another. Soon he was surrounded with lot of life's luxuries; PDA, laptop, convertible-top Mercedes Benz, etc. Later he realized there is a price to every bargain. He has to loose his sovereignty. The prerogative to practice as he sees fit, impervious to inclinations and impulses was taken away from him. He became a customary agent and benefactor of the devil.

Is the relation between Physicians and Pharmaceutical industry any different? Surely, they are no devils. It is just an industry. Like any other industry, they are governed by profit-maximization. They don't claim to be operating for altruistic purposes. All the expensive gifts they offer to doctors, as promotional items, comes either from the marketing or Research and development (R&D) budget; in any case it is the patient who has to pay the cost. Economics of health care industry remains enigmatic for most health care providers. Question to ask is; how long will we give-in to impulse of sponsoring CME's, recent advances work-shops and conference trips through pharmaceutical industry. Evidence has shown that they feed biased information<sup>1</sup>. Fact of the matter is they influence systematic-research in order to have desirable results<sup>2</sup>.

Like devil, they target (pious) opinion leaders. Recently, I have received an e-mail from corporate head asking me to list few individuals, in my area of research, who are expected to be opinion leaders in the coming ten years; off course with some compensation for my efforts. This brings us to the dilemma of industry sponsored research. Before starting a project one has to sign a legal binding; sponsor is entitled to have a look at the first draft of the publication. In a small print one can also read that sponsor has the legal-right to ask researcher for delay in submission of paper – mostly in lieu of patent issues. All the issues related to bona fide null hypothesis and scientifically valid clinical equipoise goes out of the window with such contracts. In any case, young researcher always runs the risks of compromising his integrity if things go dirty.

Through the journal of Pakistan Psychiatric Society (JPPS), young researchers and physicians need to be guided in their interaction with the industry.

Like any other industry, interaction with pharmaceutical has to be regulated within some ethical norms. As Jung writes 'once you have sold your soul, it is hard item to retrieve. Those who have already given-in to such impulses can only be told – heal thy self Physician!

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### HEAL THY SELF PHYSICIAN — CAN JPPS HELP?

This letter points out to a very important issue. We at the editorial board feel flattered that the author expects the JPPS to guide the researchers and physicians in their interaction with the industry.

Unfortunately the debate on this issue has mostly been limited to the extreme positions. The recent issue of "World Psychiatry" has useful articles trying to disentangle this complicated matter<sup>1,2</sup>. JPPS can offer its pages for debate on this or any other issue of interest to our readers. However, I would like to point out that the very existence of JPPS has been maintained through the "courtesy" of this "devil", This gives me no comfort in saying that the same is the case with many reputed journals not to speak about a nascent journal like JPPS. Although, the publication of the journal has been mainly sponsored by pharmaceutical industry, it gives me some pleasure in putting the JPPS as a model in a way to deal with the industry.

One of the salient features of the JPPS is its emphasis on the evidence based medicine and developing critical appraisal skills. The editorial board believes that

the only way, doctors can confidently deal with the onslaught of the industry is to equip the practitioners with the skills to evaluate the literature. JPPS is perhaps one of the few journals in the country which regularly publishes the "Cochrane Corner". Many readers of the journal will agree that at present Cochrane Collaboration is the main source which systematically evaluates the evidence available for all the health care interventions and it is largely free of industry influence. In this regular feature of the journal, we published highly critical review of the products promoted by the pharmaceutical companies which have regularly been our sponsors.

I believe we need not to forget that pharmaceuticals is an industry and a commercial business.

There is no such thing as free lunch but we should also be proud of being true professionals, always being aware of our learning needs while serving the best interest of patients and having the ability to differentiate commercial interest from the valid scientific findings.

## REFERENCES

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**The Editor**