

■ Research Doesn't Support Many Common Medical Tests

The November 15, 2003 issue of the British Medical Journal reports that many of the commonly performed medical diagnostic tests do not have high quality evidence that proves they are effective at monitoring the diseases for which they were ordered.

Researchers at Hope Hospital in Manchester, UK, led by Dr. P.J. Sullivan reviewed the records of 90 patients to see which clinical tests were ordered in their case and why they were ordered. After identifying which tests were done, the research team performed a Medline search to see which tests were supported by evidence that they were effective.

Of the 165 tests they examined, only about half of them were supported by high-quality evidence. In fact, the researchers found that there were no studies whatsoever for such common tests as serial chest x-rays to rule out lung cancer and ESR tests to evaluate TB.

He added that “it may be that some of these tests could benefit from more scientific study.” Many tests that medicine uses these days “were devised a long time ago, based on logic and common sense. Newer tests are much more rigorously investigated before manufacturers are permitted to market them.”

Sullivan and his team concluded there is a “clear need for further high quality research into medical tests.”

■ U.S. Spending On Medical Research Increases, Results Disappoint

A new study in the September 21, 2005 issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association finds that while annual U.S. spending on medical research has doubled in the past decade, the results of that research have provided little in the way of results and useful information.

Money for medical research is typically supplied from corporate (57% of total spending), government (28%) and charitable sources (5%). Adjusted for inflation, total U.S. spending doubled to \$94.3 billion in 2003 versus 1994.

Researcher Dr. Hamilton Moses of the Alerion Institute, North Garden, Virginia said, “there aren’t a lot of diseases where we can point to and say we have an answer today that we didn’t have a decade ago.”

“It raises the question are we getting our money’s worth? Are we capturing the full value of that significant investment?”

■ Many Practice Guidelines Written By Doctors With Ties To Drug Industry

A survey reported in the October 20, 2005 issue of the journal *Nature* says that approximately one third of doctors who write practice guidelines regarding drug utilization in the United States have ties to the drug industry that raise conflict of interest concerns.

215 drug utilization guidelines deposited with the U.S. National Guideline Clearinghouse in 2004 were examined. Only 90 contained details outlining the authors' conflicts of interest and only 31 of those were completely free of ties to the drug industry.

In those 90 guidelines that the authors examined, a total of 685 authors were involved.

- 65% of them declared no conflict of interest.
- 21% had an advisory board or consultancy position with a relevant company.
- 22% had received a research grant from a relevant company.
- 15% had a position on a drug company resource panel of expert doctors.
- 2% owned stock in a relevant company.
- 1% mentioned a different conflict of interest.
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In 2004 the Center for Science in the Public Interest checked the disclosure statements of the authors of hypertension guidelines. Even though one author had declared a conflict of interest, the center's research discovered that four other authors had received research funds from drug companies.

Merrill Goozner, director of the Center for Science in the Public Interest's Integrity in Science Project was not surprised by these findings. "There's no standard journal policy," he said, "and no punishment [for not disclosing information]."