

The 'apparent' color of money

To the editor:

I read your News Feature, "The color of money" (*Nat Med.* 9, 1340; 2003), with great interest. I have grappled with this issue for many years and am glad to see it discussed in an open forum. I'm sure such discussions will eventually lead to an appropriate system of financial ethics to protect patients and ensure the validity of studies.

I noticed, however, that the article ignored a large segment of the scientific community, namely scientists who work in industry. There are more common misconceptions about the conflicts of this group than any other. For instance, I continue to receive royalty checks from my tenure in academia, but I have also published tens of patents and developed several therapeutics for my company. My only monetary benefit from this is a fixed salary, which is approximately equivalent to that of a clinical professor at any major medical center. In my experience, scientists at larger companies do not have a profit-mediated conflict even though they are employees of profit-driven companies. We do not gain

from the outcomes of individual studies. In most cases, positive studies have virtually no effect on the stock prices of larger companies, and many scientists own so few shares that it could hardly be considered a monetary conflict.

Industry scientists lay their cards on the table. Our job is to perform research tasks for the long-term profit of the shareholders. We are discouraged from conducting misleading research for the company's short-term benefit because it only leads the company to waste more time, money and resources on a losing proposition. Similarly, it is also in the company's best interest to discontinue the development of ineffective or unsafe therapies. My only request is that the debate remove the assumption that industrial scientists are biased simply because our employer is profit-driven. The apparent conflict of an industrial scientist is, ironically, minimal compared with the major conflicts of some in academia.

As your article points out, it is academic scientists who, along with their universities, share profits on patents or biotech spin-offs,

or as part owners and board members of smaller companies. It is rare to find a respected academic scientist these days who does not have at least one such major conflict. Such conflicts could entice a scientist to be less than objective. Universities have an increasingly active role in establishing these conflicts, as they also stand to make substantial gains. University lawyers and technology transfer offices have exploded in size and scope over the last two decades, and are encouraging patents and spin-off companies as sources of alternative funding.

I do not presume to know the answer to this complex issue, but the acknowledgment of a problem and these early discussions are a great start. Identifying and addressing conflicts of interest can only benefit patients with serious diseases. It should not be forgotten that this is the ultimate goal.

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AUTHOR SUBMISSION GUIDE

Long Article

Abstract — 100-150 words of simple prose, no technical details. Focus on general advance and implications. No references.

Main text — (3000 word max) Separate sections for introduction, results, discussion and methods (800 word max). Subheadings for results and methods. Reference max of 45. Display items: 6 max including tables, figures can be multipaneled.

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Abstract — One terse paragraph of 100-200 words, with references, providing background, main results and implications. Simple prose, no technical details. This is the only introductory material in a short article.

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Methods

- Remove all methodology and discussion from the figure legends. This includes concentrations, incubation times temperatures, and so on.
- Oligonucleotide sequences are written 5'-GATCGACT-

3' (note: no spaces between the upper-case nucleotide letters).

- Provide locations of manufacturers, without abbreviations (city and state, for US; city and country for non-US): (Vector, Burlingame, California).
- Units except for % should be preceded by a space (7 °C; 12mM; 55%).
- Use symbol font for "micro": μM, not uM. If using Microsoft Word, go to "insert/symbols" to make sure the symbols do not drop out when the font changes.

General Style Points

- Use the active, not passive voice throughout the text: "We examined the retinas of the mice.", not "The retinas of the mice were examined."
- Abbreviations are not used in abstracts. Spell out abbreviations at first use in body of text.
- Mutants are referred to with superscript as follows: "C1qa^{+/+}" and not "C1qa^{+/+}" or "^{+/+}". Gene designation only is italicized; the designation for 'zygosity' is superscripted and not italicized.
- The "P" for P values is upper-case and italicized.
- The "n" for number is lower-case and italicized.
- Kilodalton is abbreviated kD.
- Full postal and email address is required for each author.
- We strongly recommend that the article be read by a

native English-speaking scientist not directly related to your field of research.

- In the text, refer to figures as (Fig. 1a, b and c) or (Table) in parentheses, at end of text referring to figure (not "As shown in Fig. 1, ...")

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- Panel letter should be lower-case, and italicized.
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