

From swine flu to stimulus funding, 2009 was chock full of big headlines in biomedicine. Here we take a look back at the people and papers that generated the greatest buzz in the past year.

Yearbook 2009

Behind the news, there are always the newsmakers. Inspired by the high school yearbook tradition, we have rounded up a few such individuals worthy of notice in 2009. Some stepped into the spotlight eagerly, whereas others operated behind the scenes.

In 2008, the British Chiropractic Association sued science journalist **Simon Singh** for an article he wrote for the *Guardian* that questioned practices supported by the organization. In early May of this year, a High Court judge ruled against Singh, but a court decision in October gave him permission to appeal.



Biggest bone to pick

Last year, **Paul Thacker**, the investigator who works for US Senator Chuck Grassley, helped blow the whistle on a slew of federally funded scientists who failed to report that they received thousands of dollars from pharmaceutical companies. This year, he is at it again. Among other things, he has looked into allegations that National Science Foundation employees spend a little too much time looking at pornography, has investigated financial ties between nonprofit organizations and drug companies, and has admonished the US Food and Drug Administration for failing to follow up on safety studies.



Best whistler

Pharmaceutical company executives rarely engage animal rights activists, but, in October, Novartis chairman and chief executive officer **Daniel Vasella** emailed 140 activists who he said had sent him critical messages, warning them that they were associating themselves with criminal activities. Several months earlier, activists stole an urn containing the ashes of Vasella's grandmother, threatening only to return it if Novartis publicly severed ties with Huntingdon Life Sciences, an animal testing center based in the UK.



Most likely to fight back

On 5 March, **Jonathan Leo**, a professor of neuroanatomy at Tennessee's Lincoln Memorial University, published a letter on the *British Medical Journal's* website criticizing a May 2008 study published in *JAMA*. Leo raised questions about several omissions in the study, including the fact that the lead author, Robert Robinson, had undisclosed financial ties to the company that manufactures the antidepressant drug Lexapro, which was being evaluated in the study. In an interview with the *Wall Street Journal*, *JAMA* editor-in-chief Catherine DeAngelis reportedly called Leo "a nobody and a nothing."



Least likely to publish in *JAMA*

This year, the US National Institutes of Health received some 20,000 applications for Challenge Grants as part of its new program under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. **Sally Rockey**, acting director of the NIH's office of extramural research, was charged with ensuring that the proposals were reviewed by the 30 September deadline.



Most deserving of a vacation

British-born **Simone Davis** was threatened with deportation for refusing to be immunized with Merck's Gardasil, which protects against certain cancer-causing strains of human papillomavirus. The vaccine was required for all 11 to 26-year-old females seeking US citizenship at the time she applied. Davis, 17, who has lived in Florida with her maternal grandmother since the age of two, argues that she does not need the vaccine because she is not sexually active.



Toughest shot at citizenship

Melinda Wenner, New York

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