

The Games Industry Plays!

A few weeks back, a vigilant member of Indian Academy of Pediatrics noted that M/s Sanofi Pasteur, a vaccine manufacturer, was distributing printout and wall charts which had altered/misrepresented the Indian Academy of Pediatrics Immunization timetable 2012 (recommendations of the IAP Committee on Immunization (IAPCOI))[1]. The said chart was titled 'IAP Immunization Table 2012' with a footnote mentioning that the same was adapted from the IAPCOI recommendations [1]. The 'tailored' chart displayed Influenza vaccine as a routine childhood vaccine recommended by IAP at 6 and 7 months of age, whereas the IAPCOI recommends this vaccine only for identified high-risk groups. This covert attempt to promote their product by misrepresentation/distortion of facts is a serious ethical misadventure that should be viewed as nothing less than "felony." In addition, they had committed a copyright violation by reproducing the contents published in *Indian Pediatrics* with no prior permission of the journal or of the body issuing recommendations. The Academy duly issued a show-cause notice to the firm. In response (in an email correspondence), Sanofi representative asserted that "... it indeed was an inadvertent error and not a deliberate attempt to gain commercial mileage." They further stated that "we sincerely and unconditionally regret this mistake and apologize for any inconvenience caused because of this to the members of the Indian Academy of Pediatrics..." Since then, Sanofi has recalled all the (mis)printed material sent for distribution. However, the question remains... Are we willing to sweep under the carpet serious ethical misadventures by accepting statements of inadvertent errors and apology issued by the industry?

The phenomenon of misrepresentation of research by the drug industry for their benefit is global. A systematic review on the quality of pharmaceutical advertisements in medical journals that included 24 articles (each article reviewing 4-24 journals) from 26 countries concluded that quality of journal advertising is not what is desirable [2]. Pharmaceutical companies do need support of academic bodies for their existence, but does the academia need them for survival? This is where the ethical line has to be drawn. Our overdependence on industry to run our own affairs will continue to encourage the industry to repeat these misdemeanors in future too. And we will continue to

lament our incapability to deal with them effectively. There should be a limit to our dependence on pharmaceutical companies. We should not forget that they are here to market their products and not for partnering us to support our philanthropic agenda. There must be a 'code of conduct' on which the academia-industry relationship must subsist.

Taking note of various media reports, the Department of Pharmaceuticals, Government of India, initiated discussions with the Pharmaceutical industry, on the issue of code of ethics. Organisation of Pharmaceutical Producers of India (OPPI) and Indian Drug Manufacturers' Association along with Confederation of Indian Pharmaceutical Industry (CIPI), and other organizations have worked out the 'Uniform Code of Pharmaceutical Marketing Practices' for Indian Pharmaceutical industry [3]. Considering that marketing expense of top 50 drug manufacturers is Rs 5340 crore an year (for a sale of 28769 crore) [4], it is high time that the voluntary 'code' comes as a regulation. It may not be able to solve all the ills but shall definitely act as a deterrent for those hell-bent on selling their products at any cost! Simultaneously, there is a need to empower the budding physicians with the art of analysing the promotional material in a most critical manner based on evidence based medicine. Practitioners need to take charge of updating their knowledge themselves. The information fed by the pharmaceutical industry needs to be seen, smelled, tasted, and scrutinised for its content; before digesting it finally!

PIYUSH GUPTA (*Editor-in-Chief, Indian Pediatrics*);
VIPIN VASHISHTHA (*Convener, IAPCOI*)

REFERENCES

1. Indian Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Immunization (IAPCOI). Consensus Recommendations on Immunization and IAP Immunization Timetable 2012. *Indian Pediatr.* 2012;49:549-64.
2. Othman N, Vitry A, Roughead EE. Quality of pharmaceutical advertisements in medical journals: a systematic review. *PLoS One.* 2009;4:e6350.
3. Code of Marketing Practices for Indian Pharmaceutical Industry. From: http://pharmaceuticals.gov.in/uniform_code.pdf. Accessed 23 August, 2012.
4. Das S. Govt to codify ethics for pharma companies next week. *The Financial Express.* From: <http://www.financialexpress.com/printer/news/976413>. Accessed 23 August, 2012.