

# Something Rotten at the Journal of Public Health Policy



By Alex Berezow, PhD — September 27, 2018

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In Act I, scene iv of *Hamlet*, Marcellus warns us, "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark." Likewise, something is rotten in the state of academic science.

Earlier this month, we revealed a [double standard at the very heart of scientific journals](#) [1]; namely, that conflicts of interest are not applied equally. A scientist who spends his free time making money as an environmental consultant or organic food advocate is treated differently than a scientist who consults for Monsanto. The former has some sort of "health halo," while the latter is treated like a suspect at a crime scene.

Despite all the pleas for transparency, the problem is getting worse. There appear to be some journals that are so ideologically driven that they don't even acknowledge that conflicts of interest exist. (And note that [ideological conflicts of interest are worse than financial ones](#) [2].) Furthermore, these journals will publish papers that are little more than self-serving screeds rather than a bona fide search for knowledge. The latest to attract our attention is the *Journal of Public Health Policy*.

## Something Rotten at the Journal of Public Health Policy

The *Journal of Public Health Policy* recently published a [paper](#) [3] that was co-authored by Carey Gillam. Yes, *that* [Carey Gillam](#) [4], the former journalist who [no longer writes for Reuters because of her anti-biotechnology bias](#) [5]. She now peddles her nonsense at an organization called U.S. Right to Know, which receives most of its money from the organic industry and is staunchly opposed to GMOs. In other words, Gillam's salary is paid by people who want her to trash agriculture, chemical, and biotech companies.

Did the journal mention this incredibly blatant financial (and ideological) conflict of interest in the article? Nope. In fact, contrary to the norms and standards of every journal I've ever read, it ran a mini-hagiography of her at the end:

*Carey Gillam is a veteran journalist, researcher, and writer. She is former senior correspondent for Reuters' international news service, member of the Society of Environmental Journalists, and author of Whitewash: The Story of a Weed Killer, Cancer and the Corruption of Science. She is a Research Director for the U.S. Right to Know, a consumer group whose mission is "Pursuing Truth and Transparency in America's Food System."*

This is scientific malpractice, so I contacted the journal's editor, Anthony Robbins of Tufts University. The e-mail I sent is reproduced below in its entirety:

*Dear Dr Robbins,*

*I'm Alex Berezow, a PhD microbiologist and science writer for the American Council on Science and Health. This is an on-the-record interview. Please respond by end of business today, if possible.*

*I came across this article in your journal, written by Sheldon Krimsky and Carey Gillam, which is about "undisclosed conflicts of interest with respect to issues of scientific integrity":*

<https://sites.tufts.edu/sheldonkrimsky/files/2018/06/pub2018RoundupLitigationDiscovery.pdf>  
<sup>[3]</sup>

*I have a few questions:*

*1) Does JPHP have its own conflict of interest policy? Are authors required to disclose their own conflicts of interest?*

*2) Assuming the answer to #1 is yes, why was Carey Gillam not required to disclose that her salary, paid by US Right to Know -- a vehemently anti-GMO group that is funded almost exclusively by the organic industry -- has a clear financial interest in criticizing glyphosate (Roundup)? Basically, JPHP allowed her to publish an article that she was paid by her employer to write, but there is no COI disclosure.*

3) Again, assuming the answer to #1 is yes, why was Sheldon Krimsky not required to disclose that he, too, has a financial stake in the outcome of the glyphosate debate? He has written a book, *The GMO Deception*, about how GMOs are putting the people and the environment at risk, yet there is no COI disclosure about this.

4) As to the content of the article itself, this statement stands out as especially problematic:

"In 2015, the International Agency for the Research on Cancer (IARC), the specialized cancer research arm of the World Health Organization, determined that the chemical glyphosate, the active ingredient in many popular herbicides, is a 'probable' human carcinogen."

IARC is actually an outlier. Its own parent organization, the WHO, disagrees that glyphosate is carcinogenic. The EPA and the European Food Safety Authority also disagree. Shouldn't this at least be mentioned in an academic article for the sake of completeness and presenting all the facts?

5) I noticed that JPHP is advertising a new report called *Toxic Docs*. Is JPHP reflexively skeptical of any science that originates in industry? If so, why?

Thanks.

Even more amazingly, the other co-author, Sheldon Krimsky of Tufts University, wrote a book called *The GMO Deception*. He personally collects money every time he scares people about science, yet even that blatant conflict of interest wasn't disclosed.

As you might have guessed, the editor of the journal did not respond. Maybe he will now.

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**Links**

[1] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2018/09/04/stinking-pathetic-double-standard-heart-scientific-journals-13377>

[2] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2017/05/30/ideological-conflicts-interest-are-worse-financial-ones-11355>

[3] <https://sites.tufts.edu/sheldonkrimsky/files/2018/06/pub2018RoundupLitigationDiscovery.pdf>

[4] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2018/05/01/glyphosate-carey-gillam-keeps-lying-early-and-often-12910>

[5] <https://www.producer.com/2017/09/who-is-carey-gillam/>