ACSH Taking on a Conventional Wisdom: Why Disclosure of Research Funding is Detrimental to Good Science:

By ACSH Staff — February 4, 1999

To the Editor:

Ralph King Jr.'s article ("Medical Journals Rarely Disclose Researchers' Ties," 2/2/98) calls for further analysis of the assertion, by the journal Epidemiology's Kenneth Rothman, that today's conventional wisdom in favor of disclosing corporate funding of research is a "new McCarthyism."

In a court of law, evidence is admissible only if the probative value of that evidence exceeds its prejudicial effect. The same rule should apply in the court of public opinion.

The alleged probative value of disclosure of funding is "to flag potential bias." The obvious prejudicial effect, as Dr. Rothman points out, is that disclosure of any corporate ties "can sometimes unfairly taint studies that are scientifically solid." Yet, how valuable is "flagging"? As any good scientist will attest, every study's hypothesis, methodology, and conclusion should be evaluated according to rigorous scientific standards, regardless of any potential conflict of interest. Thus, the "flagging for bias" argument—the sole justification for disclosure by self-righteous journalists—is merely a red herring. All we are left with is the prejudice.

By the way, Mr. King's article failed to answer what some think is a relevant question: Who funded the funding study?

Sincerely,

Jeff Stier, Esq. Associate Director