



Big Pharma owns physicians and medical school faculty says investigator – Harvard Law School

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MB Comment: This refreshingly candid lecture at Harvard Law School hits the nail on the head: Doctors and health officials don't represent the interests of patients – they are indentured servants of pharmaceutical companies. The lecturer is Paul Thacker — a former investigator for Senator Chuck Grassley (R-IA). Grassley's office has investigated drug scandals and medical corruption, including GlaxoSmithKline's Avandia (a diabetes drug that causes heart attacks). It is remarkable that Harvard Law School presented this lecture, given that some of its medical school faculty are at the epicenter of this plague of corruption. Thacker calls for sanctions for plagiarism against professors who lend their names to articles written by drug industry ghost-writers.

Add this to the factor that our launch party for the book *Vaccine Epidemic* was held at NYU Law School (I'm a contributing author to the book). Elite law schools are zeroing in on the issue of medical corruption. Vaccines are at the epicenter of this problem.

This article has a link to a video of Thacker's lecture, which is worth watching or listening to in the background. The video gets specific about cases of ghost-writing about 1/3 of the way through.

In the first lecture of the Edmond J. Safra Center for Ethics series, Paul Thacker, an investigative journalist and former U.S. Senate Finance Committee staffer, said that big pharmaceutical dollars not only own physicians but also many prominent medical school faculty who are paid to lobby for drugs.

"There's this sort of idea—an implied understanding—that doctors belong to us. But that's often not the case," Thacker said. Doctors' dependence on industry money to build and sustain lucrative practices, Thacker adds, troubles the doctor-patient dynamic.

“Why did we care about big pharmacy on the finance committee? Because the federal government pays for one-third of the drugs in the United States; they are the industry’s largest customer.” Thacker is most credited for his queries into the relationship between physicians, especially medical school faculty who receive grants, and the pharmaceutical industry. As a result of his work, the 2009 health care overhaul included new disclosure requirements for companies’ payments to doctors. Several universities have implemented stricter conflict-of-interest policies. As an investigator for Senator Chuck Grassley (R-IA), Thacker became intimately familiar with the health care industry, its web of moneyed interests, and its excesses. Thacker’s probe into Avandia, a diabetes drug later discovered to cause heart attacks, is one example of his commitment to patient safety.

A former journalist who wrote extensively on science and medicine and their connection to the political sphere, Thacker has earned the respect of many investigative reporters and corruption-fighting legislators. He has reported on drug companies giving away televisions to doctors in return for writing scripts for their promotional materials. Thacker, who is currently serving as an investigator for the Project on Government Oversight, takes issue with industry representatives who are increasingly penning or researching articles for leading medical writers, replacing objective and comprehensive review with one-sided corporate advertising. He says it’s fair to compare physicians, judges, and journalists because “their jobs require constant learning, should avoid bias, and affect the lives of many people.” He added, “Detection of ghostwriting by medical schools is limited. We’re seeing repetitive promotional articles in medical journals.”

At the end of his presentation, Thacker called for bold action from universities and academic journals: “Make data and algorithms public; make study protocol public when seeking IRB approval; require disclosure of manuscript funding in journal acknowledgement section; sanction professors for plagiarism just as they do students.”

Lawrence Lessig, the Roy L. Furman professor of law and director of the Safra Center, applauded Thacker’s efforts on behalf of American patients across the country.

“The character of integrity sometimes requires the willingness to be rude or make people angry. Thacker has interrupted many people in his work as an investigator.”