

An Interest in Conflict?

The ‘conflict of interest’ policy of the General Medical Council and the fitness to practice hearing of Dr. Andrew Wakefield, Professor Walker-Smith, and Professor Simon Murch

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Abstract

Over the last twenty years, my ‘academic’ area of specialisation has been conflict of interest and vested interest. As I say in this essay, the conflict over MMR has been shot through with conflict of interest, manipulated by the medical establishment and pharmaceutical corporations. The fitness to practice hearing at the General Medical Council (GMC), essentially a trial of Dr. Wakefield and two other doctors, has witnessed a number of incidents, the first was when Professor Dennis McDevitt was proposed by the GMC as the ‘Panel’ or jury chairman. When it was disclosed by campaigners that McDevitt had been on the Joint Committee for Vaccination and Immunology that had agreed the licensing of Urabe strain MMR, he was speedily dropped and Dr. Surendra Kumar became his replacement. Well into the hearing in October 2008, I decided to look at Dr. Kumar’s background. I found that at least until the year that the sitting began, he had a shareholding in GlaxoSmithKline, as well as a number of other relationships with drug companies. When this essay was put up on the CryShame web site, rather than simply issue a statement resolving the suggestion of Dr. Kumar’s shareholding, the essay invoked the wrath of the GMC and I was publicly reprimanded by the panel Legal Assessor. After a great deal of argument, correspondence and posturing by the GMC during which they never admitted, denied or explained Kumar’s shareholding, it transpired that the GMC did not have a conflict-of-interest policy. This was particularly ironic when one of the major charges being brought against Dr. Wakefield was that he had not declared a conflict of interest in his *The Lancet* case-review paper on the relationship between Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD) and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

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