

# Can disclosure hurt the translation of research?

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All major clinical trials now include disclosures detailing who funded the study to ensure transparency. However, is it possible that this transparency is actually hurting research? One might assume that the methodological rigor of the study matters to physicians more than the disclosure. However, in a new study, researchers at Brigham and Women's Hospital (BWH) have found that pharmaceutical industry sponsorship of a research study negatively influences physicians' perceptions of the study and their willingness to believe and act on the research findings. This study will be published in the September 20, 2012 issue of the *New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM)*.

"We found that physicians downgraded their perceptions of industry funded research similarly for high-quality studies and low-quality studies," explained Aaron Kesselheim, MD, JD, assistant professor of medicine in the Division of Pharmacoepidemiology and Pharmacoeconomics at BWH, and principal investigator of this study.

The research team presented abstracts describing hypothetical clinical [trials](#) of three fictional, but potentially useful, [new drugs](#) to a national sample of board-certified internal medicine physicians. Each abstract was randomized to demonstrate high, medium, or low methodological rigor and randomized to report one of three disclosure variables: funding from a pharmaceutical company, funding by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), or no disclosure listed. The investigators then assessed physicians' impressions of the trials' rigor, their confidence in the results, and their willingness to prescribe the drugs.

"We found clear associations between the funding disclosure variations and physicians' perceptions of a trial's rigor and results," explained Dr. Kesselheim.

The results showed that physicians downgraded the credibility of industry-funded trials when compared with the same trials that had no funding listed, and to an even greater extent when compared with the same trials characterized as having NIH funding. The authors attributed these results to high-profile instances of unethical behavior by [pharmaceutical companies](#) sponsoring clinical research in the past decade.

Researchers emphasize that these findings have important implications. The pharmaceutical industry funds a substantial portion of clinical research, and a key determinant of the impact of a trial should be its methodological rigor, not its funding source, Dr. Kesselheim and his co-authors argue.

"While there is good reason to be extra vigilant about industry-funded research, if physicians are reluctant to trust all such research, this could hinder the translation of even high-quality industry-funded research into practice. Strategies such as greater transparency and independent review of trial data could be pursued to try to change such attitudes among [physicians](#)," Dr. Kesselheim suggested.

Provided by Brigham and Women's Hospital

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