

BMJ urged to widen its approach to transparency

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(Medical Xpress)—A group of University of Otago health policy researchers, based in Dunedin and Christchurch, has called on the leading medical journal *BMJ* to be much more even handed in scrutinising the transparency of what it publishes.

Professor Robin Gauld, the Director of the Centre for Health Systems, has co-written a letter that has appeared in the *BMJ* on 31 May, expressing concern about a journal editorial reviewing a [report](#) into the performance of the Canterbury District Health Board (CDHB) prepared by the King's Fund in England.

The report, released in September 2013, talks about the 'impressive progress' of the CDHB since the 2010 and 2011 earthquakes, but Gauld says it turns out the board paid \$186,000 for the King's Fund to produce the document.

"This funding was not revealed in the report and in its editorial the *BMJ* seems to have simply accepted the findings as independent, with no disclosure of the CDHB's involvement," he says.

"The *BMJ* has always been a champion of [transparency](#) when it comes to funding and other conflicts of interest. If we were submitting such a report we would have to declare funding sources and potential conflicts of interest - right down to saying which conferences we had attended and who paid for them.

"Those principles of transparency and independence have not been applied here."

In the letter to the *BMJ* Professor Gauld and his colleagues Antony Raymont, Phil Bagshaw, Gary Nicholls and Chris Frampton, say the King's Fund may have reported some useful lessons for those interested in [health](#) system integration but, unfortunately, it did not acknowledge among other less positive indicators the level of unmet need for health care in Canterbury which is ongoing.

"Rather, as in the case of the pharmaceutical industry, notorious for selective reporting of clinical trials, we believe public perception has been manipulated. A transparency protocol for reports such as the King's Fund's and Editorials on them would, in future, reduce this possibility."

Professor Gauld says such a protocol could be developed and extended to other publications by way of the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors.

Provided by University of Otago

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