

Is the pharmaceutical industry subverting CME?

Editor's Corner

EXPRESS STOP

Unworthy attack: The head of the FDA Bureau of Drugs has charged that growing influence of drugmakers over postgraduate education threatens the integrity of the profession. Using rhetoric, not facts, he accuses journals such as *Patient Care* of slanting editorial content and, by implication, duping physician readers. We reject his thesis as unreal, undocumented, and uncharacteristic of a government official usually known for fair balance.

A respected physician who should know better has used overkill and innuendo in an attack on the pharmaceutical industry, on controlled circulation publications such as *Patient Care*, and—by implication—on physicians who use such journals for continuing medical education.

The attacker is J. Richard Crout, MD, director of the Bureau of Drugs of the FDA, who has enjoyed a reputation as an advocate of fair balance and factual presentation in communications—at least until his aberrant performance before the Senate subcommittee on monopoly.

Dr. Crout's thesis is that the influence of the pharmaceutical industry over the continuing education of physicians is growing rapidly and is a long-term threat to the integrity of the profession. One major form of undue influence, he claims, is exerted through advertising support of controlled circulation journals, which, by his definition, usually "do not have a rigorous review" of editorial content of the type conducted by what he calls the "scholarly medical journals." His cure is to place control of CME materials with the medical schools, and he leaves the door open for Government to help bring this about.

We reject Dr. Crout's thesis as specious, simplistic, and unsupported by evidence. His testimony is short on carefully researched data and long on personal political rhetoric—subtly worded statements of so-called fact that are nothing more than hollow speculation—and negative innuendos. Here are some selected examples:

» "It is reasonable to ask why our

profession should be subject to an onslaught of allegedly educational material, not subject to the kind of independent review given the scholarly medical literature, which is financed by the drug industry, and ultimately paid for by our patients."

» "I must wonder whether a journal that subsists wholly on sales of advertising space to the drug industry is able to present a skeptical attitude toward drugs in general or toward specific drugs. . . . For whatever reasons the editorial content of these controlled circulation journals [mailed to physicians without charge] is overwhelmingly optimistic about drug therapy."

» "Usually it is acknowledged [by editors of controlled circulation journals] that whenever material severely adverse to a sponsor is received, that sponsor is given the opportunity to rebut that material before it goes into the journal."

» "The problem is that the industry sponsor can choose from among the many medical authorities on any given topic to support only those whose views already coincide with those of the sponsor. This ability . . . is the basic cause of the biases."

» "There can be no doubt that scholarly medical journals should contain new information about drugs and should not be limited to the contents of approved package inserts. The issue here is whether such an article in a controlled circulation journal presents, in the guise of a scientific paper, promotional information which otherwise could not be legally published as drug advertising or drug labeling. . . . The Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic



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