Conflicts of Interest Often Unreported in Meta-Analyses

BY JANE ANDERSON  FROM JAMA

M ost meta-analyses of pharmacotherapies or treatments published in major medical journals fail to include information on financial conflicts of interest in the original trials, even when the trials were funded by the pharmaceutical industry or include authors employed by drug manufacturers, a study showed.

The omission of those data from meta-analyses represents “a major gap in the reporting of conflicts of interest,” and suggests that, without a formal reporting policy, “conflicts of interest” from randomized, controlled trials are unlikely to be reported when results are synthesized in meta-analyses, wrote Michelle Rosenman of the psychiatry department at McGill University, Montreal, and her colleagues.

The authors recommended that the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) reporting guidelines, which most researchers follow when reporting data for meta-analyses, be updated to require authors of meta-analyses to report funding sources of included randomized controlled trials.

Authors of meta-analyses also should include information on trials’ funding sources and authors’ financial ties to industry when evaluating the risk of trial bias, the study authors wrote.

The researchers investigated whether meta-analyses of pharmacological treatments published in “high-impact” medical journals included information on the conflicts of interest reported in the original studies. They selected 29 meta-analyses of patented pharmacological treatments, all of which were published in 2009 in major medical journals, including JAMA, the Lancet, Annals of Internal Medicine, and BMJ.

The 29 meta-analyses included 509 randomized clinical trials. Only two meta-analyses reported randomized controlled trial funding sources, and none reported author-industry ties or employment by the pharmaceutical industry [JAMA. 2011;305:1008-17].

However, when the study authors evaluated the individual randomized controlled trials included in the meta-analyses, they found that more than 62% included information on the trial’s funding source. Of those, nearly 69% were funded in part or entirely by the pharmaceutical industry, about 30% were funded by non-industry sources, and fewer than 1% received no funding.

Only about 26% of the randomized controlled trials included in the 29 meta-analyses reported author financial disclosures. Of those, nearly 69% reported one or more authors having financial ties to the pharmaceutical industry.

Almost all of the randomized controlled trials included in the 29 meta-analyses—95%—reported author affiliations, and more than 26% of the trials included at least one author employed by the pharmaceutical industry.

None of the 29 meta-analyses analyzed reported author-industry financial ties or employment associated with the included clinical trials.

Fla. Judge Allows Implementation Of Affordable Care Act … for Now

U.S. District Court judge in Florida ruled that the federal government can continue to implement the Affordable Care Act, despite its own earlier judgment voiding the entire law.

In a 20-page ruling full of twists and turns, Judge Roger Vinson clarified his Jan. 31 decision, in which he ruled as unconstitutional the law’s provision requiring individuals to obtain insurance—known as the individual mandate—and threw out the remainder of the law because its provisions could not be severed.

In the clarification, Judge Vinson wrote that he had meant for the Jan. 31 ruling to have the force of an injunction and had expected the federal government to halt its implementation of the law.

However, since implementation has continued, Judge Vinson decided to issue the government a “stay,” which would allow officials to continue moving forward with the law.

But the stay was conditional. After Judge Vinson wrote that the government must file an appeal of his original ruling within 7 calendar days and seek an expedited appellate review, the Justice Department sent its request to the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals on March 8.

—Mary Ellen Schneider