Relationships with the Alcoholic Beverage Industry, Pharmaceutical Companies and Other Funding Sources: Holy Grail or Poisoned Chalice?

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Addiction Research Funding Sources

- Government agencies (e.g., science, health, policy)
- Non-governmental agencies (e.g., treatment service providers, development organizations)
- International health organizations (e.g., WHO)
- Private Foundations (e.g., Soros, Gates)
- Industry (e.g., alcohol, tobacco, pharmaceutical, gambling)
- Self or institutional funding

Ways Funding Sources Can Influence Research

- Direct censorship
- Limit access to data
- Direct or implicit threat to cut off future funding
- Choice of inexperienced investigators
- Set the research agenda
- Create real competing interests that lead to biased science
- Create doubt about research findings of others
- Raise questions about integrity of science

The current worldwide infrastructure of alcohol science

- numerous governmental research funding sources,
- over 85 specialized scholarly scientific journals,
- scores of professional societies,
- over 100 research centers,
- thousands of scientists investigating genetic, biological, clinical, psychological, economic and social aspects of alcohol.

Areas where industry interests interact with alcohol science

- industry sponsorship of research funding organizations
- direct financing of university-based scientists and centers
- research conducted through contract research organizations
- research conducted by trade organizations and SAPROs
- publication of scientific documents and support of scientific journals
- sponsorship of scientific conferences and presentations at scientific conferences
- efforts to influence public perceptions of research, research findings and alcohol policies

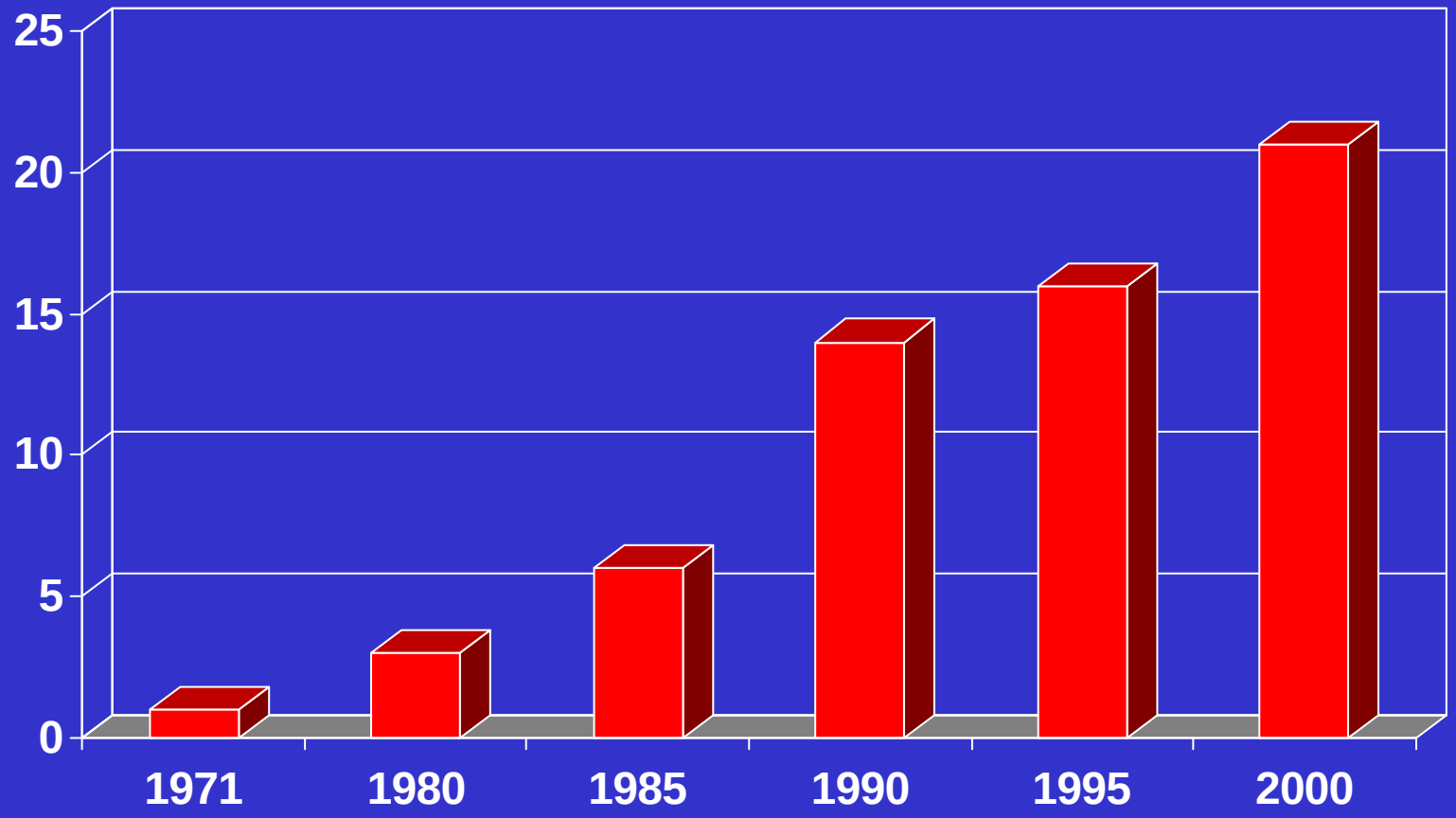
The Alcoholic Beverage Industry

- Producers - brewers, distillers, vinters (multinational, national, local)
- Wholesalers - marketing
- Retailers – distribution through bars, restaurants, off-premise sales
- Advertisers
- Social aspect organizations
- Trade associations

Social Aspect Organizations: Ostensible Role

- Support youth prevention activities
- Support scientific research
- Promote road safety and crime reduction

Social Aspect Organizations Funded by Alcohol Industry



Worldwide Brewing Alliance: Global social responsibility initiatives
British Beer & Pub Association, 2003

Actual Role of Social Aspect Organizations

- Public relations
- Lobbying for industry-favorable policies
- Neutralize opposing views and criticism
- Promote industry-favored scientists
- Oppose unpopular but effective policies
- Support ineffective but popular policies

Sponsorship of Independent Research Funding Organizations

- European Research Advisory Board (ERAB),
- Alcoholic Beverage Medical Research Foundation (ABMRF),
- Institut de Recherches Scientifiques sur les Boissons (IREB).

These organizations generally consist of

- a board of trustees that often includes industry representatives,
- a scientific board charged with scientific review and grant awards, and
- a secretariat that administers the research funds to independent scientists.

Direct support provided to university-based scientists

- the Portman Group supported the positions of several researchers.
- Diageo gave 1.5 million euros to University College Dublin to study the “drivers” of binge drinking, and is currently funding researchers to do studies on illicit brewing in Africa
- The International Center for Alcohol Policies (ICAP) has supported conferences, workshops, and surveys in Africa, as well as the writing of book chapters
- The Weinberg Group seeks “consultants” to advise SAB Miller about alcohol policy

ICAP Research (Houghton, 1998)

- Comparison of 1984 with 1996 surveys sent to trade associations and SAPROs in more than 30 countries.
- The author concluded from the comparison that:
  - SAPROs and trade associations have increased their level of activity regarding alcohol education programs (ignoring the fact that in 1984 all but one of the respondents represented trade associations so the increase could have been due entirely to the addition of new SAPROs);
  - that independent evaluation of these programs is "being taken seriously," a statement supported only by anecdotal data;
  - "the message of individual responsibility is gaining currency for a number of social aspects organizations" (ignoring the fact that only one SAPRO was surveyed in 1984);
  - "the gap between industry funded bodies and public health funding agents is not as great as it once was" (no data presented).

ICAP Survey of Health Authorities

- An international survey of 114 national health authorities
- Solicited views about alcohol policies and partnerships with the alcohol industry
- 42% response rate
- Concluded that alcohol education was a priority area for partnerships, especially in developing countries

Publication of scientific documents and support of scientific journals

- Funding of edited volumes (ICAP, ILSI)
- Publication of literature reviews and short reports
- Distribution of abstracts
- Support of scientific journals (Alcohol and Alcoholism, Alcohol Research)
- Risks/Problems: failure to disclose funding sources, pressure on editors to publish industry favorable articles

Sponsorship of Scientific Conferences and Presentations at Scientific Conferences

- ICAP-sponsored symposia at RSA and presentations at ICAA
- Industry support of hospitality hours
- Payment of travel funds and honoraria
- Organization and sponsorship of scientific meetings
- Risks: Even small gifts, honoraria, and travel support can influence professional judgment and bias research results

Pharmaceutical Industry

- Reviews of medication studies of drugs for cancer, heart disease, smoking cessation, asthma, diabetes demonstrate industry support can bias research findings (Brennan, et al., 2006)
- Industry support can create a publication bias in favor of a particular drug or therapeutic approach
- Influence clinical investigators and practitioners through continuing education, presents, samples, speakers bureaus, conferences.

Tobacco Industry

- The tobacco industry is responsible, directly or indirectly, for 4.1% of the global burden of disease

- There is evidence that tobacco industry funding violates core principles of academic institutions, as suggested by the lack of a commitment to open scientific inquiry, the misuse of scientific information for corporate profit, and industry manipulation of the research agenda

History of Phillip Morris in relation to scientific research

- The tobacco industry has a long history of activities directed at the misuse of science and scientific information to market their products to vulnerable populations and to make cigarettes more addictive
- Internal documents show that the tobacco industry, including Phillip Morris, has used university-based scientists to oppose health policies designed to prevent diseases caused by cigarette smoking

Phillip Morris

- Until 1998, most tobacco industry funding for academic investigators came through the Council for Tobacco Research (CTR) and the Center for Indoor Air (CIAR). These organizations were a primary target of the lawsuits filed against the tobacco industry in the 1990's by the State of Minnesota and BC/BS alleging fraud

- Support of academic scientists through CTR and CIAR provided supportive publicity for the industry, allowing them to recruit "outside" scientists to serve as industry witnesses in lawsuits and regulatory forums. It also helped the industry raise questions about the science

What is the main objective?

- Internal industry documents show that the tobacco industry's research funding programs are designed in part to cultivate naïve or venal scientists to serve their own public relations programs
- Industry research programs are designed to perpetuate the belief that the issues concerning cancer and addiction are still open to question and that further research is needed before public health measures are taken
- The industry's self-stated reasons for funding scientific research include building litigation and the regulatory process, and creating controversy about the health risks of smoking

Why acceptance of industry funding of research is inadvisable

- Tobacco industry support may bias the research agenda and confuse the policymaking process
- The careers of investigators may be compromised by accepting tobacco industry funding. Some research funding agencies (e.g., NCI of Canada) will not fund researchers who receive support from the tobacco industry

PERIL Analysis

- Is the PURPOSE of this particular organization or institution (i.e., "excellent medical care through research and education") consistent with the stated purpose of the funding agency (e.g., a drug company searching for a cure for addiction)?
- What is the EXTENT of the funding? Will a small amount of research support compromise the independence of an investigator?
- Relevant harm associated with the funding source
- Will the recipient of the funds be IDENTIFIED with the funder
- Is the nature of the LINK between recipient and donor direct or indirect?

PERIL Analysis: Phillip Morris

- Is the stated purpose of this particular academic institution (i.e., "excellent medical care through research and education") consistent with the stated purpose of Phillip Morris (to sell cigarettes to adults, without taking responsibility for the harm caused)?
- What about the extent of the funding? Is the small amount of research support offered by Phillip Morris sufficient to compromise the independence of an academic medical center with a large portfolio of government research grants and contracts?
- Is there relevant harm associated with Phillip Morris' continued marketing of tobacco products?
- Will the recipient of the funds be identified with the funder so that Phillip Morris might derive a public relations benefit from its support of university-based scientists? And could the scientists eventually be exposed to reputational risk if their names were associated with Phillip Morris?
- Is the nature of the link between recipient and donor direct or indirect?

Conclusion

- To the extent that PERIL analysis could be used to raise personal and organizational awareness of moral jeopardy, it may enhance an individual's capacity to reach an informed judgment about the pursuit of funding from the tobacco, alcohol, pharmaceutical industries and other funding sources.

And even if an institution is too timid to take a stand, a thorough PERIL analysis may at least warn away individual investigators whose reputations, if not their science, may be influenced by association with a company like Phillip Morris.

What is the proper role of social, behavioral and basic scientists?

- Alcohol scientists should be very wary about accepting research funding directly from the industry, its trade associations or SAPROs.
- Consulting arrangements wherein scientists are paid to critique the work of other scientists constitute a serious financial conflict of interest
- Acceptance of fees for book chapters, background reports, attending conferences and writing letters to the editor should be prefaced by careful consideration of the following questions: 1) To what extent is the activity designed to promote the commercial interests of the alcoholic beverage industry? 2) Will the funding source be acknowledged?
- Funding from independent organizations (e.g., ABMRF and ERAB) may be consistent with scientific and public health aims if the grant review process is independent, transparent and peer reviewed. But scientists need to be careful that their objectivity and independence are not compromised by fraternizing with industry executives, paid travel to meeting sites, and consulting fees.
- Scientists whose research is misrepresented by industry trade associations and SAPROs should contest the use of scientific information in the interests of commercial aims.

What about industry-sponsored dialogues and "partnerships" in relation to public health issues?

- The “hands-off” position - refuse to engage in communication or collaboration with industry representatives, based on the assumption that the industry’s commercial interests are incompatible with the values and aims of public health and with scientific research.
- The “hands-on” approach - alcohol scientists are encouraged to engage in dialogue with industry representatives, accept industry funding for their research, and participate as “partners” in industry-funded scientific activities

A third way – Build and institutional ethics capability to promote the interests of science and public health

- Encourage use of PERIL analysis when funding options are ethically questionable
- Insist on transparency in industry-sponsored funding of research related to public health issues
- Insist on rigorous adherence to COI declarations
- Disseminate information to research community that deals with industry activities that relate to scientific integrity

Inventory of ethical hazards associated with involvement of alcoholic beverage industry in scientific activities

Ethical Hazards	Research Sponsorship	Direct Support	Contract Research	Research by Trade & SAPROs	Documents Publications	Conferences & Presentations	Public Relations
Biasing research agenda	X	X		X	X	X	
Real conflict of interest	X	X		X	X	X	X
Apparent conflict of interest	X	X		X			
Failure to declare conflict of interest				X	X	X	X
Targeting vulnerable groups			X				
Research bias				X	X		
Enhance corporate responsibility image	X	X			X		X