



Dr. John J. Cunningham
Editor-in-Chief
The Journal of the American College of Nutrition
jcunningham@provost.umass.edu

Dear Sir,

The Integrity in Science project at the Center for the Science in the Public Interest routinely monitors the academic literature for failures to disclose relevant conflicts of interest of scientists who publish or are widely quoted. We engage in this activity to ensure that consumers of the scientific literature are fully aware of all the circumstances that might influence their interpretation and understanding of the information conveyed by journals.

It has come to my attention that *The Journal of the American College of Nutrition's* June supplement on sodium intake and human health failed to disclose the ties of the editor and authors to the food industry. In researching the editor's and authors' ties, I have found that the guest editor, Alexander G. Logan, who is a physician at Mt. Sinai Hospital in New York, is currently a consultant to the salt industry and scientific advisor to the International Life Sciences Institute's North American Technical Committee on Sodium, the supplement's sponsor. This ILSI committee's members include Frito Lay, Heinz Co., and Kraft Foods, all companies that rely on the extensive use of salt to enhance the marketability of their products.

First, it is surprising and disconcerting that an academic journal would allow the sponsor of a supplement to select the editor, especially one that is financially involved with the sponsor. Editors are meant to be independent arbiters of the publishing process. They should not have any relationship to the institutions, trade groups or firms sponsoring a supplement. No respectable journal should be renting out its name to the highest bidder and let industry-funded groups hand pick "guest editors."

Second, your failure to disclose Dr. Logan's ties to the salt industry was a direct violation of your own conflict-of-interest disclosure policy. You should enforce your disclosure policy in everything published in the journal's name – including sponsored supplements.

Similarly, a number of authors in the supplement had direct ties to the salt industry that were not disclosed. They included Suzanne Oparil, a paid consultant to the Salt Institute, and former editor of an *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* supplement that included papers of a salt conference also sponsored by ILSI; and Michael H. Alderman, also a consultant to the Salt Institute. Not surprisingly, both authors downplayed the risks from salt consumption. The authors also included Robert P. Heaney, a paid consultant to the dairy industry, whose review of calcium and salt effects on bone density declared that, "At calcium intakes at or above currently recommended levels, there appear to be no deleterious effects of prevailing salt intakes on bone or the calcium economy." Each of these articles emphasized the lack of literature and information needed to inform a stricter policy on salt intake for the general population as a

whole; a conclusion that greatly benefits large food producers who would find it inconvenient to change their current practices. Due to my limited research, I may well have missed other authors in the supplement with similar conflicts of interest.

Third, based on our conversations, it would appear that these articles did not undergo your normal peer review process. I would recommend that you adopt peer review guidelines for your paid supplements that are no different than those currently in place for the main part of the journal.

Finally, you have allowed the articles contained in the supplement to be indexed in the National Library of Medicine's MEDLINE. This is a direct violation of the NLM's policy, which states:

Supplements or other publications that indicate funding derived from private, for-profit organizations will not be routinely indexed for MEDLINE unless certain conditions are met. A disclosure statement should be included within the text of each article that might be cited for MEDLINE, preferably on the title page of the article, that indicates any financial relationship that each author has with the funding source and with any product discussed or implied in the text of the article.

In light of the above violations of your conflicts of interest disclosure policies, peer review guidelines and the National Library of Medicine's indexing policies, The Center for Science in the Public Interest asks that you write a formal apology and correction in *JACN's* next issue. The correction should include disclosure of all conflicts of interest for the editor and authors whose work was contained in the supplement. We also ask that you inform the National Library of Medicine about these lapses and ask that the supplement's articles be withdrawn from MEDLINE.

Failures such as this by an academic institution that scientists and professionals look to for guidance can have far-reaching consequences, and so must be given the highest priority. We also ask that you ban those authors who failed to disclose to you their conflicts of interest from publishing in your journal for at least three years. This policy was instituted by *Environmental Health Perspectives* in 2004 after a similar situation was brought to light.

I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

Corrie Mauldin
Project Coordinator, Integrity in Science Project
The Center for Science in the Public Interest

Follow-up e-mail: 10/23/2006

From: Merrill Goozner, mgoozner@cspinet.org

To: John Cunningham, jcunningham@provost.umass.edu

Subject: Erratum to CSPI Letter of Oct. 2, 2006

Dear Dr. Cunningham,

An error may have crept into our correspondence to you on Oct. 2nd. This note is to correct that record, although I do not believe this correction in any way lessens the concerns that Corrie Mauldin expressed to you in the original correspondence.

First, it has come to our attention that Dr. Alexander Logan contends that he is not a paid adviser to the sponsor of your September supplement, the ILSI North America Technical Committee on Sodium, which comprises major food manufacturers who use large quantities of salt in their processed foods. There is no doubt that he is an adviser (see <http://www.ilsina.org/NR/rdonlyres/840B5B09-028F-4D5E-A91C-449172526533/0/Sodium.pdf>).

There is also little doubt that he was once a paid adviser to the Salt Institute. According to a June 22, 1997 article in the London Observer written by Lancet editor Richard Horton, after a talk given by Dr. Graham MacGregor of St. George's Hospital on the dangers of excessive salt consumption, Dr. Logan participated in a press conference where he "denied that he was paid by the industry pressure group, the Salt Institute." Horton's account continued:

MacGregor quietly reached into his briefcase, pulled out some papers and handed them to his colleague. Logan scanned them quickly. When the reporter asked him again if he was paid by industry, he flushed. 'Yes,' he replied. There was pandemonium. (Dr. Richard Horton, "Mind & Body: Health. Have the salt sellers got their hearts in the right place?" *The Observer* of London, June 22, 1997, p. 43.)

Moreover, Dr. Logan's widely reported 1996 analysis suggesting current salt consumption patterns are safe for most people was funded by Campbell Soup. (Clive Cookson, "Salt in diet has little effect on blood pressure, says study," *Financial Times* (London), May 21, 1996, p. 1.) Both of these references are located in the Integrity in Science database at www.integrityinscience.org, and can be easily retrieved using Nexis.

By checking those three references, I hope you will see how we may have mistakenly jumped to the conclusion that his current role as adviser to the industry-backed Committee on Sodium was paid. Be that as it may, your journal did not disclose the relationship, whether paid or unpaid, as it should have. Moreover, supplement authors' financial conflicts of interest, both paid and unpaid, that existed also were not disclosed.

This in and of itself would be grounds for excluding this supplement from the National Library of Medicine database if its rules properly covered supplements financially supported by non-profits that are largely industry-funded. We intend to continue pursuing this latter matter with NLM.

Your email to Ms. Mauldin suggested you plan to write an editorial on this issue, and are revisiting your policies regarding supplements. If you reference our letter, I hope that you will note that a correction regarding the error that crept into our original item in Integrity in Science Watch and in our letter to you has been corrected in today's edition, which will soon be posted on our website at <http://www.integrityinscience.org>.

Sincerely,

Merrill Gozner
Director, Integrity in Science
Center for Science in the Public Interest