Reviewer's report

Title: The effects of industry funding and positive outcomes in the interpretation of clinical trial results: a randomized trial among Dutch psychiatrists

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Reviewer: Wendy Lipworth

Reviewer's report:

This study explores the effects of industry funding disclosures on psychiatrists' appraisals of research studies in terms of their perceived credibility, clinical relevance, quality and interest.

The authors found that perceptions were not influenced by industry funding disclosures, but perceived credibility was higher for studies reporting negative outcomes. They interpret this as further evidence that physicians often fail to recognise the impact of conflicts of interest, which include withholding of negative results and other forms of publication misconduct.

As a bioethicist/qualitative researcher I cannot comment on the methods. It was not clear to me, however, why the side effect profile was reported as different between the positive outcome abstracts (limited side effects) and the negative outcome abstract (important side effects). Could this not have been a confounding factor if psychiatrists (implicitly) assumed that a study must be credible if it clearly reported severe side effects in its abstract? This might have contributed to the higher credibility apparently assigned to "negative" studies.

Notwithstanding the above, it is an interesting finding that psychiatrists did not assign less credibility or relevance to industry-funded studies. The authors conclude from this that psychiatrists are not swayed in their assessments by knowledge of industry funding, but I think it is important to at least consider the possibility that participants (probably not unreasonably) assumed that a study of this kind would be funded by industry even without a disclosure. This potential explanation at least warrants consideration.

Finally, as a bioethicist, I would have liked to see a more developed discussion of the strengths and limitations of disclosure as a means of managing conflict of interest, and the range of possible practical implications of these findings. For example, while it may be concerning that disclosures do not impact upon assessments of abstracts, is this necessarily what disclosures are supposed to do? While I am sympathetic to concerns about industry influence and conflict of interest, one could argue that it would not necessarily be desirable for an abstract to be judged as a less worthy simply because of an industry disclosure.
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