The Corporate Co-author, The Ghost Writer, and The Medical Society: An Object Lesson (June, 2005 issue)

To the Editor:—"The Corporate Co-author" (June, 2005 issue)¹ brought national attention² to what the *JGIM* editors accurately describe as "an egregious case of unethical behavior" by the pharmaceutical industry "in order to enhance corporate profits." However, the article also raises concerns about ties between industry and medical societies that publish medical journals. One might reasonably ask, would an organization more dependent on industry funding have published the piece?

Although most organizations claim "editorial independence," there are limits. After the *Annals of Internal Medicine* published Wilkes et al's.³ study critiquing drug ads, the ACP lost an estimated 1–1.5 million dollars of ad revenue, and lost its husband and wife editing team a year later.⁴ The recent split of the *American Journal of Hypertension* and the American Society of Hypertension—the Journal's Editor maintaining the society had become a marketing arm of the pharmaceutical industry, is another example.⁵

In 2001, we had raised concerns about a decision by the SGIM Council to accept \$200,000 from the very same "ABC drugs" that commissioned the ghost-written piece.⁶ Following vocal opposition by members, the council reversed their decision. Since then, SGIM has wisely adopted external funding rules that have allowed it to remain free of such influence.⁷ Professional societies and pharmaceutical companies have different primary interests and objectives. Medical society dependence on industry "support" may lead to confusion of these interests. An example was the announcement by another medical organization of the

creation of a health policy institute through a \$750,000 grant from the very same "ABC drugs."⁸ The press release notes that a pharmaceutical executive will have substantial input in creating the institute's "long-term strategic and operational plans."⁷ The SGIM-ABC "collaboration" would have been another example of such a potential conflict.

We in the profession must not allow our goals to be subverted, and medical societies—and their journals—must lead the way. We urge other organizations to adopt external funding policies similar to those of SGIM.—**Robert L. Goodman, MD, Olveen Carrasquillo, MD, MPH**, *Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons, Division of General Medicine, New York, NY.*

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