Nature group extends rules on disclosure to review authors

Susan Mayor *London*

The *Nature* group of journals announced last week that it was extending its policy on disclosure of financial interests to include authors of review papers, in addition to authors of original research papers.

Writing in the October issue of *Nature Neuroscience* (2003;6:997), the journals' editors announced that they were widening their policy on financial disclosure after controversy over a review article on mood disorders published last November.

In February Robert Rubin, professor of neurosciences and psychiatry at Drexel University College of Medicine, Allegheny General Hospital, Pittsburgh, and Bernard Carroll, of the

Pacific Behavioral Research Foundation, Carmel, California, wrote to the *Nature* group complaining about a failure to disclose a conflict of interest.

They asked the editor to publish their letter in which they argued that one of the *Nature Neuroscience* review authors, Charles Nemeroff, who is professor of neuropsychopharmacology at Emory University School of Medicine, Atlanta, included three products to which he had significant financial ties that were not disclosed.

In their letter, Dr Carroll and Professor Rubin suggested that there were three instances of non-disclosure in the review article. They reported firstly that Dr Nemeroff held a patent on a transdermal lithium patch and that the review included a positive comment about patch technology for lithium.

Secondly, Dr Nemeroff is a member of the scientific advisory board of Corcept Therapeutics—a company carrying out trials with mifepristone, which was mentioned favourably in the

review—and, as such, was given an option to purchase 72 000 shares at a total cost of \$21.60 (£12.94; €18.43).

Thirdly, Dr Nemeroff is a director and chairman of the psychopharmacology advisory board of Cypress Bioscience, which has only one product—milnacipran—which Carroll and Rubin noted was mentioned in the review (*Nature Neuroscience* 2003;6:999).

Charles Jennings, executive editor of *Nature* research journals, replied to them in a letter explaining that the company had no policy on conflict of interest for review articles. When their original letter went unpublished Professor Rubin and Dr Carroll took the story to the *New York Times*, which published an article. The result was a change of policy at the research journals.

"We take these concerns seriously, and we are now extending our existing disclosure policy to include review articles," said Dr Jennings in the *Nature Neuroscience* editorial.

The policy applies to all types

of articles, including letters, published in *Nature* journals. For their contribution to be accepted authors will be required to return a declaration of competing financial interests. A shortened version of this declaration will be published.

"The argument for extending our existing disclosure policy is strong," Dr Jennings continued. "Studies of the clinical literature have concluded that industry funding is associated with pro-industry results, so there is clear prima facie cause for concern. One can argue that because review articles are inherently selective and opinionated, they provide more scope for bias than do reports of research results."

In the *Nature Neuroscience* policy statement, competing interests are defined as "those of a financial nature that, through their potential influence on behaviour or content or from perception of such potential influences, could undermine the objectivity, integrity or perceived value of a publication." □

Governments failing to invest in education and health

Zosia Kmietowicz *London*

Young people, especially in the developing world, are being short-changed because continuing under-investment in their health and education is stripping them of prospects for their future, says a report from the United Nations.

The world faces the largest ever generation of children on the brink of adulthood: an estimated 1.2 billion people aged between 10 and 19 years, according to the United Nations Population Fund. This surge in the number of young people offers many coun-

tries a "one-time window of opportunity" to transform their economic and social status, because it will mean that soon there will be fewer dependent younger and old people and more people of working age.

Young people all hope for a better future, says the report. And they have been encouraged by a promise from world leaders in 2000 to improve their lives by tackling problems such as extreme poverty, the spread of HIV/AIDS, maternal and child

Two children sniff glue in Nairobi, Kenya

mortality, and poor education. But they have been let down, because these pledges have been continually under-resourced.

In 2001 the total expenditure on reproductive and health services in developing countries was \$9.6bn (£5.8bn; €8.3bn), says the report. But only a quarter of this came from the international community, and the sum was less than half of what was promised in 2000. Without investment in health and education a generation of young people will flounder and the opportunity for change will be lost, with serious consequences, warns the report.

It concludes: "Governments need to do more in order to meet their international development goals and commitments to young people. The costs of failing to support young people will have serious consequences at both the individual and societal levels. These consequences range from premature deaths, higher rates of sexually transmitted infections, and unwanted pregnancies to slower economic growth, civil unrest, and the reinforcement of gender disparities." □

State of World Population 2003 is at www.unfpa.org

Young people: some statistics

- An estimated 238 million young people (aged between 15 and 24 years) worldwide, or one in four, live in extreme poverty
- More than 13 million children aged under 15 have lost one or both parents to AIDS
- 57 million young men and 96 million young women (aged between 15 and 24) in developing countries cannot read or write
- An estimated 14 million girls and women aged between 15 and 19 give birth each year
- An estimated 20 million unsafe abortions are carried out each year, one quarter of them in women aged between 15 and 19