

May 28, 2014

Dear Members of the Independent Statins Review Panel:

I write to you regarding your important charge to advise the *British Medical Journal (BMJ)* regarding the possible retraction of the articles by J. Abramson, et al. and A. Malhotra. I have, of course, read these two papers, the paper by Zhang et al., the two corrections published in the *BMJ* and the on-line letters and responses regarding these papers also published by the journal.

I am deeply disturbed by these two papers, particularly the paper by Abramson et al. I believe very strongly in the “free speech rights” in the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States and I do not support censorship of any kind, especially in science which often advances as a result of controversy. However, it is well understood that this amendment does not give anyone the right to falsely shout “Fire” in a crowded room.

Sadly, the articles by Abramson et al and Malhotra made two serious errors. The first was to present the paper by Zhang et al ~~totally~~ out of context and report an 18-20% “side effects of statins”. Simultaneously, they clearly miscalculated the number of patients needed to have their LDL-C reduced to prevent one major coronary event or stroke. I do not understand the reasons for these errors. These problems are compounded by the awkwardness of the corrections which simply repeat some of the misleading statements.

Of course, reporting on disagreements between what are perceived to be “medical authorities” who publish their controversial views in a prestigious journal makes excellent material for the public press. The unfortunate victims are patients who don’t wish to take medications and who use these “perceived arguments” as reasons to discontinue or not begin statin therapy when such use is indicated by practice guidelines. This is a threat to their health.

This is an unfortunate situation, and it could have been prevented at the time of the initial reviews or after the problems were pointed out. At this time, it seems to me that the only viable remedy is total retraction of the two papers and I hope, with respect, that you will agree.

Sincerely yours,



Eugene Braunwald, M.D.

Disclosures:

- 1) I chair the IMPROVE-IT trial, sponsored by Merck which is studying the potential benefit and risks of the addition of ezetimibe (Zetia) to a statin in patients who have recovered from an acute coronary event.
- 2) I serve as deputy chair of the Steering Committee of the REVEAL trial, also funded by Merck, which is studying the clinical effects of a novel drug, anacetrapib, on clinical outcomes in patients with a history of myocardial infarction.

In both instances Merck provides financial support to the Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Boston but not to me. I receive reimbursement for clearly identified expenses associated with these trials.