

Neurobiology of Lipids

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commentary

OPEN LETTER TO PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH ON CONDUCT BY SCIENTISTS, STM JOURNALS, AND SCIENTIFIC INSTITUTIONS

Alexei R. Koudinov

Russian Academy of Medical Sciences, Moscow, Russian Federation, c/o P.O.Box 1665, Rehovot 76100 Israel
e.mail: alexeikoudinov@neurobiologyoflipids.org

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Several recent publications in *Science* magazine seem supporting the "campaign to stop [George W. Bush Administration] misuse of science before it damages our health, safety, and environment." This open letter to The President argues that the major threat to the public health and public interest in science come from corrupted scientists, STM journals and scientific institutions. The letter quotes the author written evidence for inquiry on Scientific Publication by Science and Technology Committee, UK House of Commons. This evidence analyses the state of affairs in Alzheimer's disease (AD) research, concludes on "editorial and publisher corruption" by the major general science and neuroscience journals, and serves the basis for a referring the major conflict of interest in the field of AD for UK Serious Fraud Office investigation. The letter invites The President to lead the task to correct the situation and to help to restore integrity of science at all stages of scientific process.

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I do follow the *Science* magazine coverage of the science policy by George W. Bush Administration. Two latest reports in this week issue of *Science*

include the essays "White House: Researchers Blast U.S. Bioethics Panel Shuffle"¹ and "White House Denies Playing Politics With Science".²

The later publication quotes two documents by the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS): "One is a two-page statement on "restoring scientific integrity in policy making". The second UCS indictment is a 31-page report that summarizes 21 incidents that UCS says illustrate "a well-established pattern of suppression and distortion of scientific findings by high-ranking Bush administration political appointees."

The UCS home page headline news³ further says: "Science Distorted by Bush Administration. On a wide range of issues, objective scientific analysis has been suppressed or distorted when it fails to support the White House's political goals. UCS has launched a major campaign to stop this misuse of science before it damages our health, safety, and environment." The campaign web page adds⁴ that "Although scientific input to the government is rarely the only factor in public policy decisions, this input should always be weighed from an objective and impartial perspective to avoid perilous consequences. Indeed, this principle has long been adhered to by presidents and administrations of both parties in forming and implementing policies. The administration of George W. Bush has, however, disregarded this principle."

As a scientist I feel particularly distressed by the UCS statement, because I feel confident that those who disregarded the principle of objective science are corrupted scientists; educators; Scientific,

Technical and Medical (STM) journals; and different scientific Institutions.

The prime sad example is the apparent corruption by the *Science* magazine, the major US general science journal, and American Association for the Advancement in Science (AAAS), *Science* publisher. Thus, on my call for a honest disclosure of the competing financial interest in *Science* review article by Dennis J. Selkoe,⁵ Harvard Professor, Elan Corporation Director, and “Elan Alzheimer’s expert in pre-slump share sale” Donald Kennedy, *Science* Editor-in-Chief determined that “Dr. Selkoe’s statement [that he is “a consultant to Elan Pharmaceuticals, plc.”] is a sufficient announcement of what some might perceive as a conflict.”⁶

A year ago *Science* published Editorial material “An epidemics of politics”⁷ (that discussed the Administration policies), but failed to accommodate a critical communication arising matter “Do not underscore the epidemics of the business, too”.⁸

Last summer *Science* published presidential address⁹ “Science as a way of life: perplexities of a physician-scientist” that AAAS made freely available to all with no barrier for access, and that official AAAS news release called “Healing U.S. Health Care. AAAS Board Chairman [and an immediate past Editor-in-Chief of *Science*] Floyd E. Bloom calls for U.S. health care reform.”¹⁰ Dr. Bloom contribution included two-paragraph section on “Complex genetic diseases of the brain”. Defining “new strategies for the treatment of Alzheimer’s” Dr. Bloom particularly mentioned “vaccines for absorbing the bad fragments of APP” (a chemical precursor of the amyloid beta protein) and “enzymes to block the abnormal proteolysis» [of APP yielding amyloid beta]. The related bibliography included citations of the above mentioned *Science* article by Dr. Selkoe,⁵ and the article by vaccine developer Dr. Dale Schenk of Selkoe’s Elan Pharmaceuticals, plc.¹¹ What *Science*’s presidential address did not mention was AAAS top official competing financial interest because of Dr. Bloom’s Neurome “financing from... Elan Corporation...” and “research partnership with Elan Corporation’s pharmaceutical subsidiary to study neurodegenerative disorders”.

The above issues were addressed in my correspondence with *Science* provided in my “Open letter to Donald Kennedy, *Science* Editor-in-Chief: AAAS, *Science*, Alzheimer’s disease and academic

dishonesty”, published in *Science*’s *SAGE KE* on June 16, 2003.⁹ AAAS, however, preferred to unpublish this correspondence, thus showing no interest to amend things and thus obstructing the disclosure made by others.

There are several other instances of financial conflict non-disclosure in articles on Alzheimer’s disease that informed *Science* did not inform readers about. Additional facts described elsewhere further suggest that *Science* malpractice may be endorsed by the leadership of AAAS, the publisher of *Science*.¹²

Similar unfair practices by several other major scientific and neuroscience journals, including US based Elsevier’s Cell Press *Neuron* and *Cell*; *Journal of Clinical Investigation*; Elsevier’s *Brain Research*; and UK’s *Nature*, illustrate editorial and publishing institution corruption, and their apparent inability to serve public interest.

One may be curious to know that one of those who signed UCS statement “Restoring Scientific Integrity in Policymaking”,¹³ Nobel laureate and reviews editor of major neuroscience journal *Neuron*, Eric Kandel, also serves as Chairman of the Scientific Advisory Board and principal scientific founder of Memory Pharmaceuticals. Because neither *Neuron*, nor UCS statement mentions Dr. Kandel commercial affiliation, I wonder what is the reason for the non disclosure? Does Dr. Kandel utilize his post as *Neuron* review editor and UCS prominent signatory to build the value for his company?

The above and other facts as well as the conclusion on “editorial and publisher corruption” are presented and referenced in my written evidence for inquiry on Scientific Publication by *Science* and Technology Committee, UK House of Commons that is currently underway.¹²

The blind lack of recognition of the insider’s malpractice by the Union of Concerned Scientists, makes problem worse, and represents a real threat not only for the public health, but also for the higher education, and science at large.

“Do you work in a federal agency or have you participated on a scientific panel where you have seen science compromised?”, asks the UCS call to report abuses. I would further ask why concerned scientists limit their inquiry to *Scientific integrity in Policymaking*? Why they do not see compromising scientific inquiry commercial ties and other

conflicts among members of the scientific community?^{8,14} Why do major STM journals systematically help to conceal the dishonesty by scientists?^{8,12,14} Is the above a biased transfer of responsibilities to the Administration from those who choose making or serving science their profession, i.e. scientists, STM journal's editors, publishers, universities, other educators, scientific professional societies?

Thus, for example, the Dean of the Harvard University Faculty of Medicine, Dr. Joseph Martin, and Harvard Provost, Dr. Steven Hyman, key individuals to safeguard the University and the Faculty of Medicine academic integrity, were among those scientists who receive my alerts on the wrongdoing by Dennis Selkoe, Harvard faculty member. In science when one publishes an article on a subject he/she commits public responsibility for the article content, and binds to engage in scientific communication, so, any colleague may contact a person with a post-publication follow up. This is why contributing on the subject of my research Dr. Martin^{15,16} and Dr. Hyman¹⁷ were my correspondence recipients. A year ago in reply on my alert of D. Selkoe conflict in serving major US Alzheimer's disease research Potamkin Prize chairperson,^{18,19} Dr. Joseph Martin noted: "Please take me off your e-mail list". I satisfied Dr. Martin request but still remain curious whether he should instead originate a well overdue Harvard University inquiry and determination on Professor Selkoe conflict, and educate Harvard students, faculty and the international scientific public about it?

As Universities and journals hide the conflicts by their faculties and authors, respectively, no wonder the corrupted scientists serve the referees for tenure and promotion committees; get seats at the different academic committees, grant review boards, scientific panels; and serve the reviewers for journals, thus further corrupting the higher education, the academia, the STM journals, and the peer-review system of grant proposals by federal agencies and charitable organizations.

Mr. President, I appreciate your scientifically neutral proclamation of the "National Alzheimer's Disease Awareness Month, 2003".²⁰ This important Presidential Document mentioned that "through the National Institute on Aging (NIA), we are funding Alzheimer's Disease Centers across the country that care for patients, improve diagnostic techniques, and participate in long-term research." What you apparently did not know about (because of the lack of disclosure by scientists, STM journals, and scientific Institutions) is that Dr. Selkoe, a person with severe conflict of interest,

served as member of the governmental National Institute of Health (NIH) National Advisory Council on Aging (NACA) for a number of years.

Should an overdue Harvard determination and still missing full disclosure (of the authors' financial conflict of interest) in *Science* and other journals justify Selkoe banning from serving NACA and other scientific panels? banning Dr. Howard Weiner (another Harvard Professor and Selkoe's business partner) from serving as a member of the Federal Drug Administration (FDA) Peripheral and Central Nervous System Drugs Advisory Committee?^{21,24} and prompting concerned scientists to focus on a different priority when linking Scientific Integrity and Policymaking.^{4,13}

What morale should be drawn from the silence of Harvard Provost and the Dean of the Harvard School of Medicine? Does their doing nothing means the support of the corruption by others? Or it means their personal corruption and the corruption by the University? If so, to what extent the education at Harvard is compromised, and to what degree corrupted are other Harvard scientists, graduates, students, and postdocs, colleagues and proteges of Selkoe, Weiner and others, who know of the misconduct first hand? What kind of ethics doctors and researchers, Harvard graduates, hold at a time of graduation?

As *Science* Editorial wrote few years ago,²⁵ "in the evaluations for tenure that are regularly undertaken in U.S. universities, publication in *Science* [and *Nature*] is accorded great weight. U.S. deans and provosts count journal prestige and citation frequency heavily; so do academic administrators in Europe." If so, what additional morale does emerge from the apparent corruption of *Science*, *Nature*, *Neuron*, *Cell* and other journals (described in details elsewhere^{12,14})? Is it a conclusion that such University appointments are prejudicial?

No wonder caring junior scientist regrettably wrote to me: "It seems your fight to expose academic misconduct in the field of Alzheimer's disease research has met with many of the same roadblocks as my battle to secure protections for junior researchers. Both our problems are impediments to true scientific progress to be sure. However, the far worse problem (and common to both our cases) is this academic climate that exists today which tolerates if not outright facilitates non-ethical behavior in effect rewarding non-disclosure and dishonesty. I admire your tenacity to persist with your cause in the face of adversity and particularly that you aren't afraid to call out the offending individuals and identify accomplices. In my case I

cannot disclose the institution or the individuals who perpetrated the misconduct without risk of legal action being brought against me which I presently do not have the resources to adequately defend myself against.”

Highlighting the major point of the above quote: “the far worse problem (and common to both our cases) is this academic climate that exists today which tolerates if not outright facilitates non-ethical behavior in effect rewarding non-disclosure and dishonesty.”

Look at Alzheimer Research Forum (ARF), a not-for-profit foundation with a web site that some consider a primary source on the information related to the field of Alzheimer's disease research. Although ARF invites (not demands) authors to disclose any potential conflicts,²⁶ it seems involved in a dishonesty game, because voluntary conveying financial conflict information apparently never worked properly.²⁴

An example of the Society for Neuroscience (SFN, Washington, DC) seems proving the above conclusion, as it illustrates an inability of the major professional society of the neuroscientists to handle the dishonest behavior by others, and the SFN unwillingness to let others to speak on the corruption.²⁷ Such conduct by the Society may harm the integrity of the American Medical Association continuing medical education PRA credit system and was accepted for investigation by Charles E. Willis, Director, AMA PRA Standards and Policy Liaison Activities.²⁸

While SFN observes the code of silence, American Physiological Society (APS) “did review this case... [of D. Selkoe conflict non disclosure in the article published in 2001²⁹], and found no wrongdoing. We consider this case closed,” wrote to me APS's Dale Benos, Chair, Publications Committee, and Margaret Reich, Director of Publications and Executive Editor.³⁰

The code of silence is also observed by the American Academy of Neurology (AAN) that awarded in 2001 the major American Alzheimer's and Pick's Diseases Research Potamkin Prize to Elan scientist Dr. Dale Schenk. This prize is managed by AAN Potamkin Prize selection committee chaired since 1999 by Dennis Selkoe, who's service as Director for Elan was not disclosed in any AAN document.¹⁸

No wonder the opinion of a public group was manipulated as illustriously showed the unipolar view on Alzheimer's disease in the Public Citizen's Health Research Group letter addressed to Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson and aimed at stopping an Alzheimer's Anti-Inflammatory Prevention Trial by the NIA.²¹

One of my colleagues, an established US professor in neuroscience research, says (with regard to my written evidence for UK inquiry on scientific publication¹²) that “the apparent corruption, collusion and conspiracy you have uncovered among scientists who misuse their power and influence may only be the tip of the iceberg. You have a very difficult task in trying to correct this situation. I wish you luck in your venture.”

The convincing view of the present disaster of science corruption by its' insiders come from a major ethicist Dr. Sheldon Krinsky in a comprehensive analysis book “Science in the Private Interest: Has the Lure of Profits Corrupted Biomedical Research?”³¹ in an associated book review by Richard Horton,³² editor of the major general medicine journal *Lancet*, and in a recent editorials and postpublication discussions in the *British Medical Journal*.^{33,34} One of these contributions quotes Pope determination on the matter, so, one may wish to know what President of the United States of America thinks about all this.

CONCLUSION

Mr. President, I believe it is your responsibility to lead this difficult task to correct the situation, and thus help to restore scientific integrity at all stages of scientific process, ranging from higher education, faculty appointments, and to scientific publication. I believe that restoring scientific integrity should begin with passing the legislation introducing personal responsibility for dishonesty by those who choose making or serving science a profession, and calling on Congress to investigate and act on the issues, described in my written evidence¹² and in my call for a UK Serious Fraud Office.³⁵

COMPETING INTEREST STATEMENT

I do not have any competing financial interest. I serve as founding and managing editor of the *Neurobiology of Lipids* (ISSN 1683-5506), an unpaid position. *Neurobiology of Lipids* has no affiliation with any professional association, publisher, industry member, commercial enterprise,

public, educational or government organization. The viewpoint presented in this open letter is my personal view. It does not represent the viewpoint of the journal or its' editorial board members.

Neurobiology of Lipids

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Every scientist and student must know what Open Access is. Do you? If not then study the Guide to the Open Access by the recognized expert, Professor Peter Suber. Its' introductory and scholarly communication crisis paragraphs are quoted below

Guide to the Open Access Movement

Formerly called the *Guide to the Free Online Scholarship Movement*.

This is a guide to the terminology, acronyms, initiatives, standards, technologies, and players in the open-access or free online scholarship (FOS) movement –the movement to publish scholarly literature on the internet and make it available to readers free of charge and free of unnecessary licensing restrictions.

The guide has many purposes. It should help you find background on unexplained terms or names you encounter in research on any related topic. For the same reason, it will allow me to use terms and names in my newsletter without explaining each one every time. Above all, it should make it easier for specialists from one sector (such as research, libraries, publishing) to understand the contributions to this movement made by specialists from other sectors. This movement isn't only multi-disciplinary, encompassing all the academic disciplines, but also multi-industrial, drawing on libraries and universities and such varied economic sectors beyond the academy as publishing, telecommunications, software engineering, philanthropy, and government. It is also multi-national, building on the work of individuals and organizations from around the world. Without special study one cannot appreciate the contributions of all these players to the open-access movement. I hope this guide brings recognition to the contributors and understanding to those hoping to see the big picture.

Having said this, I should emphasize that you needn't see the big picture in order to do useful work that advances the cause. If you did, we wouldn't be as far along as we are...

Scholarly Communication Crisis.

Sometimes called the *serials pricing crisis*. The crisis for libraries arising from the fact that scholarly journal prices have risen faster than inflation, and faster than library budgets, for more than 30 years. The problem is aggravated by publisher consolidation (some say monopoly), amendments to copyright law reducing the rights of users, and harsh licensing contracts further reducing the rights of users (see permission crisis). For all these reasons libraries pay much more and get much less than in the past.

- Crisis overview from Create Change, <http://www.arl.org/create/librarians/issues/quick.html>.
- Crisis FAQ from Create Change, <http://www.arl.org/create/librarians/faq/scomm.html>.
- Good overview of the crisis from CURL, <http://www.lib.ed.ac.uk/lib/news/curldoc.html>.
- Good statement from the North Carolina State University Libraries on what faculty can do to alleviate the crisis, <http://www.lib.ncsu.edu/scc/scholar.do.html>.

Further details:

Guide to the Open Access URL: <http://www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/guide.htm>

UK Parliament Inquiry on Scientific Publication URL: http://www.parliament.uk/parliamentary_committees/science_and_technology_committee/scitech111203a.cfm