

VALE UNIVERSITY ANALYSIS

# Does greed slant scientific research?

*Survey raises questions about academia's ties to business benefactors*

By ROBERT LEE HOTZ  
Los Angeles Times

**NEW YORK** — The scramble for profit warps the way scientists and universities conduct medical experiments, undermining the integrity of research, said Yale University investigators who studied the impact of commercial funding on science.

One quarter of the biomedical researchers at universities had commercial ties serious enough to raise the questions of financial conflicts, the analysts found. In many cases, it was enough to bias their research.

Moreover, the universities expected to police the integrity and ethics of faculty scientists have their own commercial research interests and financial conflicts. At least two-thirds of the universities also were involved in commercial ventures, holding equity shares in start-up companies whose research they were also expected to monitor. Twenty-seven universities had equity in 10 or more start-up companies, the researchers said.

The result is slanted science.

Industry-sponsored research is 3.6 times more likely to produce results favorable to the company that helped pay for it, the Yale researchers determined in a university-funded study

made public Tuesday in the journal of the American Medical Association.

"Medical research is a matter of life and death," said Yale University medical analyst Justin Bekelman, who led the study team. "The guidance patients receive from their doctors relies on valid scientific research."

In all, the Yale researchers assembled and analyzed data from 37 previously published peer-reviewed studies — covering hundreds of research projects, thousands of scientists, and more than a thousand peer-reviewed scientific papers — on the extent, im-

pact and management of financial conflicts.

They named no scientists or schools involved, and revealed no companies. Conducting the most extensive study of commercialism and science so far, they did identify a troubling trend in biomedical research.

Even as public spending on biomedical research doubled in the past five years, the financial ties between academic scientists, universities and industry became more common and more likely than ever to influence research findings.

By necessity, the public looks

for reliable medical guidance almost every day.

Public health warnings, medical claims and policy pronouncements come draped in the cloak of scientific authority, usually backed by a bible of published research findings. But along the frontier of science and business, the line between research and marketing can be hard to find.

"It is getting harder and harder to find someone who can conduct the research or evaluate the research who does not have a financial interest in a particular product or particular company or a particular outcome," said bio-

medical ethicist Mildred Cho at Stanford University.

This financial tangle is the consequence of a basic change in the way biomedical research is conducted in the United States several experts said.

Commercial funding, once an anathema to ivory tower academics, has become the lifeblood of biomedical research, fostered by federal laws and regulatory changes since 1980 that give scientists and schools more freedom to profit from work once considered in the public domain.

Whether it comes in direct grants and consultant fees or

through gifts of research materials and travel expenses, commercial funding can affect a researcher's behavior, said health-care analyst David Blumenthal at the Harvard University Medical School.

It can sway the kinds of the scientific questions researchers ask, the way they frame experiments, and the role they play in influencing the medical decisions that people make about their health.

Several medical research analysts said the pharmaceutical industry is especially aggressive in its efforts to influence research-

## Researcher's funding assailed

Associated Press

**DURHAM** — A doctors' group says a Duke University scientist's reports on nicotine's beneficial effects are compromised by grants from the tobacco industry.

"We're afraid this will give a green light to smoking," said Michael Murphy, spokesman for the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine.

The committee held a news conference in Raleigh on Tuesday to ask the March of Dimes to stop funding nicotine experiments on animals, including those being conducted at Duke University.

Researcher Edward Levin said the group's allegations are flawed.

"I've never advocated anyone take up smoking," he said. "In fact I've done quite a bit of research into helping people quit smoking."

The Physicians Committee, which says its members promote "preventive medicine and higher standards in research," said Levin has received more than \$1 million in grants from the tobacco industry and is now being funded by the March of Dimes.

Levin said he has received funding from tobacco companies and from the March of Dimes, but that the tobacco funding was less than \$1 million.

"It must be four years since I was funded by the (March of Dimes)," Levin said. He said his tobacco funding ran out last year and that it never amounted to \$1 million.