



January 17, 2019

Dr. Marc Tessier-Lavigne
President
Stanford University
Building 10
Stanford, CA 94305-2061

Ronald G. Pearl M.D. Ph.D.
Chairman
Department of Anesthesia
Stanford University
300 Pasteur Drive, Room H3580
Stanford, California 94305

Dear President Tessier-Lavigne and Chairman Pearl:

I am the Executive Director of [Checks and Balances Project](#), a nonpartisan government and industry watchdog. Our focus is on sustainability, government ethics and industry-funded pundits who masquerade as impartial when published or aired by influential media.

Since last October, we've been looking into an organization called Physicians Against Drug Shortages and its media campaign against Group Purchasing Organizations (GPOs) that buy medical supplies in bulk for hospitals and other healthcare providers.

That trail has led us to Stanford University Professor of Anesthesia Emeritus John G. Brock-Utne, MD, PhD. Late last year, [The Bulletin](#), a publication of the Santa Clara County Medical Association and the Monterey County Medical Society, published an article by Professor Brock-Utne in which he made the case that "drug makers and other suppliers have been locked out of the hospital marketplace by group purchasing organizations."

Not disclosed by Brock-Utne nor The Bulletin is that the professor has received \$48,245 from drug and medical device companies since 2013, according to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services Open Payments [database](#). Not disclosed, as well, is that Professor [Brock-Utne is a co-chair](#) of Physicians Against Drug Shortages, an organization with other members that have financial ties to drug and medical device companies, based our reporting.

The notion that GPOs are responsible for high drug prices was [discounted in a seminal study](#) by the U.S. General Accounting Office in 2014. Physicians Against Drug Shortages either ignores or misrepresents this study in their public communications.

Professor Brock-Utne has a right to his opinion. But we believe the public has a right, too, and that is to know about his financial conflicts of interest.

We have sent Professor Brock-Utne the following questions, but have yet to receive a reply:

1. In light of the recent New York Times-ProPublica investigation into the influence of healthcare companies on medical journal research, should you have disclosed the more than \$48,000 you received since 2013 from drug and medical device companies when you submitted your article to The Bulletin?

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2. Do you see the \$48,000 you received from drug and medical device companies as a financial conflict of interest?
3. Will you ask The Bulletin to update your article with more disclosure of your ties to drug and medical device companies?
4. Have you coordinated your message in The Bulletin with Physicians Against Drug Shortages Executive Director Phillip Zweig or any other PADS co-chair?
5. Are you aware of any financial contributions from drug or medical device companies to Physicians Against Drug Shortages?

A recent joint investigation by the New York Times and ProPublica into the former chief medical officer of Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, [Dr. José Baselga](#), reported that he had failed to accurately disclose payments from health care companies in dozens of research articles. Though this was unrelated to Physicians Against Drug Shortages, we believe the disclosure that resulted is good policy. Dr. Baselga ultimately resigned from Sloan Kettering, as one of the chief editors of the journal Cancer Discovery and from the boards of three drug and equipment makers. The NYT-ProPublica story reported:

“Baselga’s disclosure lapses have [prompted a broader discussion](#) over the influence of the drug and health care industries...Teaching hospitals across the country have reminded faculty members of their obligation to disclose, and some have begun re-examining which relationships are appropriate.”

It is our intention to bring this problem to the attention of The Bulletin’s Managing Editor, Ms. Pam Jensen. We have also published a new post about this matter on our blog titled, [6 Physicians Against Drug Shortages Co-Chairs Received Payments from Companies](#). You’ll find more detail there.

We request that you remind Professor Brock-Utne of his disclosure responsibilities as laid out in the Stanford Industry Interactions Policy (SIIP) and take appropriate action. Section V.D.3 states:

“If a faculty member is listed as an author on any publication resulting from performance of their consulting services, the following disclosure must be made in the publication: Dr. [NAME]’s contribution to this publication was as a paid consultant to [COMPANY NAME]. Dr. [NAME] is not providing this material as part of his/her Stanford University duties or responsibilities.”

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Scott Peterson
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cc: Catherine Ho, San Francisco Chronicle