

July 1, 2009

Dear Dr. \_\_\_\_\_:

The United States Senate Committee on Finance (Committee) has jurisdiction over the Medicare and Medicaid programs. As a senior member of the United States Senate and as Ranking Member of the Committee, I have a special responsibility to the more than 100 million Americans who receive health care coverage under those programs to ensure that beneficiaries receive drugs and devices that are both safe and effective.

Over the last year, the Committee has been examining a practice used by drug and device companies referred to as “medical ghostwriting.” This practice involves payment from these companies to marketing and/or medical education companies to draft review articles, editorials, and/or research papers on the drug or device companies’ products. The draft articles, editorials and/or research papers are then presented to prominent doctors and scientists, particularly those affiliated with academic institutions, to sign on as authors, whether or not they are intimately familiar with the underlying data and relevant documentation. It has also been alleged that the listed authors sometimes have minimal or limited input in the development and/or writing of the article. When published, the actual involvement of these listed “authors” is not always clear.

Articles published in medical journals are widely read by practitioners and are relied upon as being objective and scientific in nature. Concerns have been raised, however, that some medical literature may be little more than subtle advertisements rather than independent research. The information in these articles can have a significant impact on doctors’ prescribing behavior and, in turn, on the American taxpayer, as the Medicare and Medicaid programs pay billions of dollars for prescription drugs and medical devices. Any attempt to manipulate the scientific literature, which can in turn mislead doctors to prescribe treatments that may be ineffective and/or cause harm to their patients, is very troubling.

As the editor of a major medical journal, you may be able to shed light on the role companies may play in the dissemination of information about their products through medical literature. Accordingly, I would appreciate your response to the following questions:

1. What is the journal’s position regarding the practice of ghostwriting?
2. Does the journal have any written policies regarding ghostwritten articles? If so, please provide a copy of those policies.
3. Is an author who submits an article for publication required to disclose to the journal the direct or indirect involvement of any drug or device company or other third party in the development and/or writing of the article?

4. What are the journal's policies or practices regarding public disclosure of the involvement of any drug or device company or other third party in the development and/or writing of a journal article, in particular when the listed authors are not affiliated with the company or third party?
5. Since 2004, has the journal taken action against any author for failing to disclose the involvement of a third party in the development and/or drafting of a manuscript? If so, please provide details.

Thank you in advance for your assistance and cooperation. I would appreciate your written response by no later than July 22, 2009.

Sincerely,  
Charles E. Grassley of Iowa  
United States Senator  
Ranking Member of the Committee on Finance