

Doctors and patients across this nation trust the pharmaceutical companies to tell the truth regarding the risks and benefits of the drugs they sell. They also trust the FDA to help ensure that truthfulness. Recently, in the Journal of the American Medical Association, Dr Marcia Angell suggested our trust may be misplaced. Dr. Angell, a former editor of the *New England Journal of Medicine*, went so far as to say that “the medical literature on commercially sponsored products isn’t believable.”

In recent times, the FDA has relaxed its policies regarding medical research. It now allows pharmaceutical companies and makers of medical devices to perform their own research and submit their own findings with little oversight. For some reason it was assumed that these companies would act in the best interest of the public. Surprise, surprise...it seems they have not.

The drug and medical device companies have invented a number of ways to skew research findings to make their products seem better than they actually are. Negative results are often not published, so noone ever knows about them. Those that are published are often spun to make them appear positive to everyone but the most careful readers. Positive results are often published repeatedly in different formats to make it look like multiple studies have shown the product to be beneficial. This also makes it more likely that the media will pick up on the study.

There are other ways that these companies have devised to make their products appear better. They often select inferior products to compare their new products with thus making the new product seem superior. They also use inappropriate methods of measuring the results of the product.

Dr. Angell suggests that the current research system needs to be redesigned to protect, patients and provide doctors with accurate information upon which to base their recommendations. At this point it is difficult to tell which of the medications people are currently taking that have been based on faulty research or faulty reporting of that research. If you are taking a medication on a regular basis, I would suggest that you talk to your doctor and find out if he or she is aware of this information. It is important that your doctor take into account the possibility that the study results on which his or her treatment recommendations are based, may be faulty.

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