Prescrire International Editorial

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DSM-5: riddled with conflicts of interest

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders is published by the American Psychiatric Association. Like other professional societies and institutions in the health sciences arena, APA has adopted a policy intended to deal with conflicts of interest (1). But is it effective?

An analysis of six new DSM diagnoses. The DSM and the process for its development have drawn increasing criticism with each new version, mainly because of the growing number of clinical situations it describes as pathological, with their treatment often involving drug therapy (2,3).

A team of researchers has examined the efficacy of the APA's conflicts of interest policy during preparation of the fifth version of the DSM, published in 2013 (1). They focused on six controversial new diagnoses, seeking financial links between APA members involved in preparing the DSM and drug companies that funded clinical trials in the relevant indications. For these six diagnoses, the researchers identified a total of 13 clinical trials involving 11 drugs. Nine of the 13 trials concerned new indications that would allow companies to obtain 3-year patent extensions if marketing authorisation were to be granted (1)

Massive conflicts of interests. Fifteen (27%) of the 55 members of the groups working on one of these six diagnoses had at least one link to a company with a stake in the relevant indication. This was also the case for 19 (61%) of the 33 members of the groups responsible for final validation of DSM-5.

For three (23%) of the 13 trials, a member involved in the preparation of DSM-5 had served on the speakers bureau for one of the companies concerned. In three cases, the principal investigator of the clinical trial was also involved in preparing DSM-5 (1). In only one case did none of the trial investigators take part in the preparation of DSM-5 (1).

DSM discredited. Thus, the working groups charged with integrating the six new diagnoses into DSM-5 were clearly under the influence of drug companies. In addition, these diagnoses correspond to claimed indications for certain drugs manufactured by the companies in question.

The permeability of this learned society, clearly incapable of instituting regulations to ensure its intellectual independence from the pharmaceutical industry, undermines the credibility of the entire DSM.

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Selected references from Prescrire's literature search.
1- Cosgrove L et al. "Tripartite conflicts of interest and high stakes patent extensions in the DSM-5" *Psychother Psychosom* 2014; **83** (2): 106-113.
2- Prescrire Editorial Staff "DSM-V: madness!" *Prescrire Int* 2011; **20** (112): 24.
3- Prescrire Rédaction "Comment la psychiatrie et l'industrie pharmaceutique ont médicalisé nos émotions" *Rev Prescrire* 2010; **30** (317): 230.

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