Industry Support for Academic Endeavor — A Fruitful Collaboration

GEORGE O. WARING III, MD, FACS

The popular and scientific press seem preoccupied with conflicts of interest in scientific research and medical practice. Most reports spotlight the negative aspects of the relationship between industry and laboratory research and clinical practice, emphasizing the corrupting influence of commercial pressures.

Commercial firms seek to exert their influence over the minds and hearts of physicians early in their training. Every medical student has been approached by drug companies with offers of gifts, trips, parties, and other favors to attract their attention, in hopes of boosting future sales. Every ophthalmic surgeon is familiar with recent intraocular lens kickback schemes driven by the fierce competition of the marketplace. Indeed, the practice of medicine itself has succumbed to commercial pressures, mutating into the health-care industry, in which both the government and third party payers cajole physicians with the best deals for patient care.

Dangers threaten commercially sponsored research. Commercial considerations can eclipse disclosure of negative results. Premature enthusiasm, overselling to investors, inappropriate hype of early positive results, and corrosion of adequate scientific safeguards threaten constantly.

Does this mean that collaboration between industry and science and medicine should not exist? Not at all. As long as such support is publicly disclosed and properly accounted for and as long as it does not result in the manipulation of scientific or clinical information, the collaboration is a fruitful one that we heartily endorse and for which there is a growing need. The collaboration between commercial industry and academic endeavor is inadequately acknowledged. It deserves a spotlight.

Two major forces have relegated to the past the days of academic isolationism. The first force is the enormous increase in the technical complexity of modern scientific research and clinical practice. The number of universities—and specifically, the number of university ophthalmology departments—that have the resources to mount programs in molecular biology and biophysics are few. Without direct industry support, such programs falter. The development of the excimer laser for corneal surgery is a good example of industry-supported research that promises great benefits for patients and surgeons alike. I doubt that any university research laboratory, government funding agency, or private practitioner would have put up the money and resources necessary to develop the excimer laser for ophthalmic applications.

The second force is the marked reduction in funds for laboratory and clinical research from federal agencies and universities. Because of this, private philanthropic organizations have increasing demands on their resources. The result is a more active turn to industry for needed economic support.

In addition, many researchers who develop new products or processes rush to patent and commercialize their discoveries before disclosing them to the scientific public. Many laboratory investigators and clinicians have fled academics to establish their own commercial enterprises, drawing support and resources from the greater commercial community. Industry has the talent, knowledge, and economic muscle to bring to fruition projects and products that would otherwise remain wishful fantasies and uncompleted research.

Industry support extends not only to research, but also to projects and programs such as special lectureships and scientific meetings that would otherwise go unfunded. The positive side of this relationship is obvious. Recipient institutions, organizations, and individuals benefit because their programs remain
Table
Corporate Supporters of
ISRK Surgical/Technical
Demonstration Sessions

- Allergan Medical Optics
- Chiron Ophthalmics
- Computed Anatomy
- Deknatel, A Division of Pfizer
- DGH
- EyeSys Laboratories
- H1-Line Medical
- Moria Dugast
- Nidek
- Steinway Instrument Company
- Summit Technology
- Visiopic
- VISX

ongoing. Industry benefits by drawing on the expertise of researchers to help develop their products and by keeping their name and products before the public eye as a form of advertising. The collaboration provides an opportunity for industry to give back to those who buy its products and services.

The International Society of Refractive Keratoplasty (ISRK) is fortunate to receive support from industry for programs that would otherwise be impossible. Alcon Laboratories, Inc supports the annual Barraquer Lecture presented at the ISRK Refractive Surgery session during the American Academy of Ophthalmology meeting. Allergan Medical Optics supports the Lans Distinguished Refractive Surgery Lecture delivered at the ISRK midwinter meeting. The unique ISRK surgical and technical demonstration sessions that are an integral part of the annual meeting give participants hands-on experience with new products and techniques, allowing ophthalmologists a more realistic chance to assess advances in the field. Numerous companies supported this special session as well as the Third International Congress on Corneal Laser Surgery sponsored by the International Corneal Laser Society (now part of ISRK) (Table).

At this time, support for advertising in the scientific print media is shrinking; we express our appreciation to those companies that advertise in Refractive and Corneal Surgery. We think the Journal provides a target audience for the message of these manufacturers; the advertising supports the growth and development of the Journal.

Collaboration between industry and science and medicine can be productive and fruitful, as long as conflicts of interest are properly disclosed and controlled.1

REFERENCE

REFRACTIVE AND CORNEAL SURGERY has recently been accepted into INDEX MEDICUS. The National Library of Medicine indexes the periodical literature that has been judged most useful to Index Medicus users. Since not every journal is listed and more journals apply than can be indexed, this is an important milestone in the development of our Journal. Decisions on retroactive indexing of volumes 1 through 6 are still pending. Of the 281 journal titles reviewed by the Literature Selection Technical Review Committee, 56 (20%) were selected for indexing. REFRACTIVE AND CORNEAL SURGERY was one of six new titles added. We congratulate the Editorial Board, authors, and readership in both the International Society of Refractive Keratoplasty and the European Refractive Surgery Society.