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Top Psychiatrist Didn't Report Drug Makers' Pay

Published: October 3, 2008

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Income of \$10,000 or more from the company in any year of the grant — a threshold Dr. Nemeroff crossed in 2003, 2004, 2005 and 2006, records show — would have required Emory to inform the institutes and take steps to deal with the conflict or to remove Dr. Nemeroff as the investigator.

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A report from Emory's conflict of interest committee in June 2004, which detailed multiple "serious" and "significant" violations of university procedures intended to protect patients.

Repeatedly assured by Dr. Nemeroff that he had not exceeded the limit, Emory did nothing.

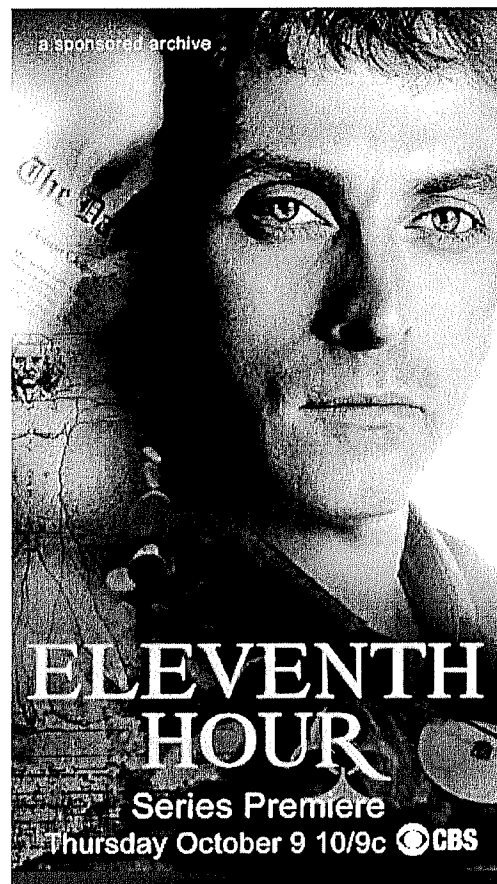
"Results from N.I.H.-funded research must not be biased by any conflicting financial interests," John Burklow, a spokesman for the health institutes, said in the kind of tough statement that in the past has rarely been followed by real sanctions. "Officials at Emory are investigating the concerns."

"Failure to follow N.I.H. standards" on conflict of interest, Mr. Burklow continued, "is very serious, and N.I.H. will take all appropriate action to ensure compliance."

In 2004, Emory investigated Dr. Nemeroff's outside consulting arrangements. In a 14-page report, Emory's conflict of interest committee detailed multiple "serious" and "significant" violations of university

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systematically asking some of the nation's leading researchers to provide their conflict-of-interest disclosures, and Mr. Grassley is comparing those documents with records of actual payments from drug companies. The records often conflict, sometimes starkly.

"After questioning about 20 doctors and research institutions, it looks like problems with transparency are everywhere," Mr. Grassley said. "The current system for tracking financial relationships isn't working."

The findings suggest that universities are all but incapable of policing their faculty's conflicts of interest. Almost every major medical school and medical society is now reassessing its relationships with drug and device makers.

"Everyone is concerned," said Dr. James H. Scully Jr., the president-elect of the Council of Medical Specialty Societies, whose 30 members represent more than 500,000 doctors.

Dr. Nemeroff is a charismatic speaker and a widely admired scientist who has written more than 850 research reports and reviews. He was editor in chief of the influential journal *Neuropsychopharmacology*. His research has focused on the long-term mental health risks associated with child abuse as well as the relationship between depression and cardiovascular disease.

Dr. Nemeroff did not respond to calls and e-mail messages seeking comment. Jeffrey L. Molter, an Emory spokesman, wrote in an e-mail statement that the university was "working diligently to determine whether our policies have been observed consistently with regard to the matters cited by Senator Grassley."

The statement continued: "Dr. Nemeroff has assured us that: 'To the best of my knowledge, I have followed the appropriate university regulations concerning financial disclosures.'" On Friday night, Emory announced that Dr. Nemeroff would "voluntarily step down as chairman of the department, effective immediately, pending resolution of these issues."

Mr. Grassley began his investigation in the spring by questioning Dr. Melissa P. DelBello of the University of Cincinnati after The New York Times reported her connections to drug makers. Dr.

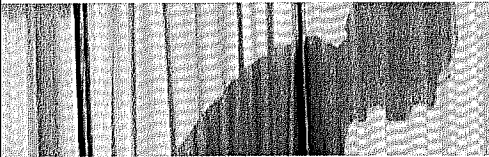
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DelBello told university officials that she earned about \$100,000 from 2005 to 2007 from eight drug makers, but AstraZeneca alone paid her \$238,000 during the period, Mr. Grassley found.

Then in early June, the senator reported to Congress that Dr. Joseph Biederman, a renowned child psychiatrist at Harvard Medical School, and a colleague, Dr. Timothy E. Wilens, had reported to university officials earning several hundred thousand dollars each in consulting fees from drug makers from 2000 to 2007, when in fact they had earned at least \$1.6 million each.

Then the senator focused on Dr. Alan F. Schatzberg of Stanford, president-elect of the American Psychiatric Association, whose \$4.8 million in stock holdings in a drug development company raised concerns.

Mr. Grassley has sponsored legislation called the Physician Payment Sunshine Act, which would require drug and device companies to publicly list payments to doctors that exceed \$500. Several states already require such disclosures.

As revelations from Mr. Grassley's investigation have dribbled out, trade organizations for the pharmaceutical industry and medical colleges have agreed to support the bill. Eli Lilly and Merck have announced that they would list doctor payments next year even without legislation.

The National Institutes of Health have strict rules regarding conflicts of interest among grantees, but the institutes rely on universities for oversight. If a university fails, the agency has the power to suspend its entire portfolio of grants, which for Emory amounted to \$190 million in 2005, although the agency rarely takes such drastic measures.

Dr. Nemeroff was the principal investigator for a five-year \$3.9 million grant financed by the National Institute of Mental Health for which GlaxoSmithKline provided drugs.

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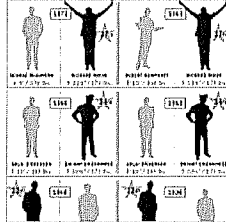


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