

LETTER

Response to Letters by Clapp and Williams and by Michaels

Dear Editors:

To achieve the most good for the most people, individual clinical decisions, as well as rational health policy decisions, should be based on a sufficient totality of evidence that includes the unique and crucial contribution of epidemiology. In this context, honest scientists will have honest differences of scientific opinion. The letters by Michaels (1) and Clapp and Williams (2) provide neither cogent nor new evidence to refute our scientific view, detailed in our article (3), that in the Hemorrhagic Stroke Project (HSP), it is not possible to conclude that there is a valid statistical association, let alone make a judgment of causality concerning phenylpropanolamine (PPA) and hemorrhagic stroke (4).

We take umbrage at the spurious allegation by Michaels of “mercenary epidemiology” (1). We decided to write our article for scientific reasons and did so long after our connection to the litigation ended in 2003. Serious scientists benefit from the exchange of serious scientific views. Such scientists would not want our views dismissed because of our disclosed prior connection to the PPA litigation any more than they would want dismissed any cogent views that might be offered by Williams, Clapp, and Michaels because of their current or past connections to the PPA litigation. Williams is an attorney currently representing plaintiffs in the PPA litigation, and Clapp has been an expert witness for plaintiffs. Michaels is director of, and apparently receives his disclosed salary support in connection with, the Project on Scientific Knowledge and Public Policy (5), on whose planning committee Clapp also serves and which features on its Website a case study entitled “Phenylpropanolamine” that is written by Clapp and that subscribes to plaintiff counsel’s views of the HSP (6). Half of the case studies the Project on Scientific Knowledge and Public Policy currently provides are written by Clapp in connection with his involvement in litigation, one concerning PPA, and all are directed at the general public, not the scientific community (6, 7).

We do not support letters to the editors of scientific journals to serve as placeholders for litigation, as well as ad hominem or any other approaches that limit information available to the scientific community. Society suffers if we

either deprive justice to true victims or clog the courts and bankrupt companies without a sufficient totality of scientific evidence. Thus, we advocate providing any new and meaningful scientific information that becomes available in litigation, with proper disclosures of potential conflicts of interest, and toward that end, we offered and continue to stand by our article.

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