

# Science

## *Independence and Quality*

### *Why do have to complicate this?*

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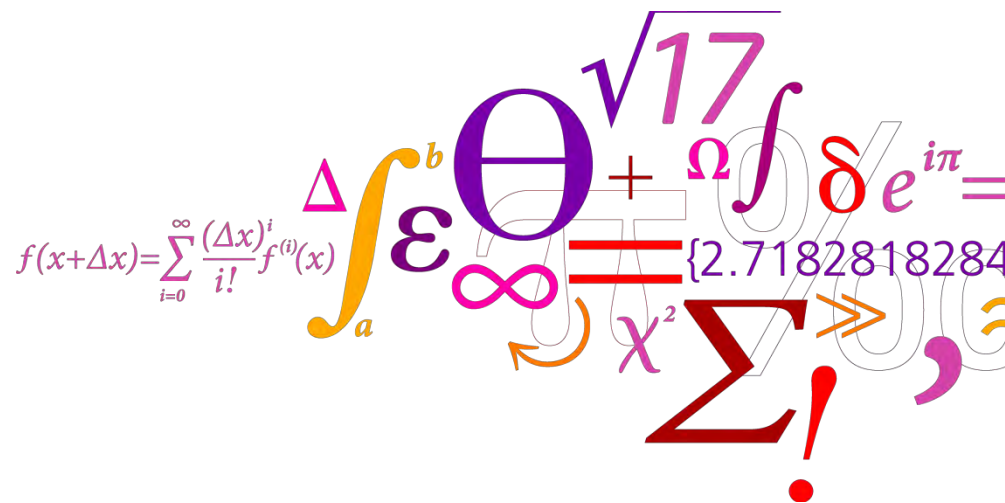
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**"There is a pathway from good science to publication to evidence, and to programs that work.**

**In this way research becomes an inherent part of problem-solving and policy implementation"**



**Julio Frenk**

**Former Mexican Minister of Health**

**Dean, Harvard School of Public Health**

# Starting with basics

Quality of science is generally assessed by peers

Independence of scientists is assessed by bureaucrats

(Peers can be stupid and bureaucrats can be sensible, but not always)

There is no doubt that in real life, amongst ordinary consumers, quality of science is often mixed up with independence of science

This is, however, in my opinion not right

We can have very high quality ‘dependent’ science (e.g. development of important new drugs in a company setting) and we can also have poor quality ‘independent science’

# Communicating basics

If we agree that Quality and Independence of science are two different issues – have we then managed to communicate this

**NO!**

*Qualifyer:*

We have been able to explain to a large fraction of the general population that quality of science relates to the peer-review system in journals

We have not been able to explain clearly and unanimously what we mean by independence in relation to scientists

# Is that a problem?

If we say we have messed up our messages on Independence, why is that?  
(Will get back to that)

And is independence really perceived to be a problem in relation to scientists?

**Yes!**

In my opinion most people are appalled when they hear that scientists presenting (positive) data about some product have actually been paid by the Company producing that product

‘But does that really happen’, I can hear someone say down there!!

**Yes, it does!**

# What did Tobacco do to WHO?



In 1999 WHO Director General instigated an international investigation based on the released ‘Tobacco papers’. In 2000 the report was ready.

[http://www.who.int/tobacco/en/who\\_inquiry.pdf](http://www.who.int/tobacco/en/who_inquiry.pdf)

The report documented that tobacco companies tried to distort scientific studies on tobacco and to discredit WHO as an institution. And the report also shows that tobacco company strategies to undermine WHO relied heavily on international and scientific experts with hidden financial ties to the industry

Let’s not be naïve – when people are paid by a company producing a certain product it is very unlikely they will want to document problems in this product

**We don’t even need science to know this!**

# So, what's the Col fuss?

In my opinion someone related to the industry corner (and please remember my initial statements that industry science can have the highest level of quality) worried that scientists from 'their school of thought' were excluded from important assessment tasks because they had 'conflict of interest'

At the same time scientists from other 'minority schools of thought' (e.g. 'one issue' NGO's) were not considered to have 'conflict of interest'

It was therefore in the interest of some to expand the definition of conflict of interest in a number of new directions, which seems to have resulted in a situation where 'holding strong views', or having participated in assessments of the issue at hand before, is now potentially also a 'conflict of interest'

## This does not make sense !

# CoI is about economic interest

In my opinion we are getting away from the simple, clear definition of CoI that ensured transparency and understanding in society

The confusion is now near total if you want to explain to people out there what we are doing!

It has reached the level of ridicule, that scientists in the EU system that have previously participated in scientific assessments about a certain subject are now considered tainted (potential CoI) and cannot participate in a new assessment

**Come on – lets get real!!**



# Back to basics

Quality of science is (generally) ensured by publication in peer review journals. Science paid by industry can have very high quality – but funding source should always be clear.

Independence of scientists relates to economic independence

***Economic independence should be assessed based on simple and clear criteria, standardized the world over***

‘Dependent science’ can be of the highest quality and certain ‘dependent’ scientists can be absolutely essential in specific scientific committees (where they should only be allowed for working discussions, not for conclusions!)

And this should be stated in clear, simple language