

JULY 11 2006

Side Effects**Financial Ties to Drug Makers
Cloud Major Depression Study****At Issue: Whether It's Safe
For Pregnant Women
To Stay on Medication****JAMA Requests Explanation**By **DAVID ARMSTRONG**

For pregnant women considering whether to continue taking antidepressant drugs, a study in a February issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association, or JAMA, contained a sobering warning: Stopping the medication greatly increases the risk of relapsing into depression.

The study authors—most of them leading psychiatrists at Massachusetts General Hospital, the University of California Los Angeles and Emory University—said their results challenged a common assumption that hormonal changes during pregnancy protected expectant mothers against depression. In their article, they predicted the findings would prompt some women to stay on their depression medication through pregnancy. That was good news for the makers of big-selling antidepressants, who have recently faced growing questions about the safety of their medications when used during pregnancy.

But the study, and resulting television and newspaper reports of the research, failed to note that most of the 13 authors are paid as consultants or lecturers by the makers of antidepressants. The lead author—Lee S. Cohen, a Harvard Medical School professor and director of the perinatal and reproductive psychiatry research program at Massachusetts Gen-

Company Ties

A JAMA study on antidepressants didn't reveal researchers' ties to the drug makers:

Lori L. Altshuler-UCLA

- consultant or advisory board member: Abbott Laboratories, Janssen, Pharmaceutica, Solvay, four others
- speaker: Abbott Laboratories

Vivien K. Burt-UCLA

- consultant: Eli Lilly and GlaxoSmithKline
- speaker: Eli Lilly, GlaxoSmithKline, Pfizer

Lee S. Cohen-Mass. General Hospital

- consultant: Eli Lilly, Wyeth, three others
- speaker: Eli Lilly, Pfizer, three others
- research grants from Eli Lilly, Wyeth, Berlex, four others

Adele C. Viguera-Mass. General Hospital

- speaker: GlaxoSmithKline

Source: WSJ research

The work of these academic researchers highlights the role of "opinion" or "thought" leaders coveted by drug companies because of their ability to influence not only the practice of doctors, but popular opinion as well. In the case of antidepressant use during pregnancies, the industry-paid opinion leaders have become dominant authorities in the field. They help establish clinical guidelines, sit on editorial boards of medical journals, advise government agencies evaluating antidepressants and teach courses on the subject to other doctors. In some cases, the financial ties between industry and these leading researchers are not disclosed.