

Competing interest bias in academic publications

We agree entirely with Richard Smith and colleagues that competing interests beyond the financial are important, and appreciate their contribution to the debate.¹ As we state in our recent editorial,² *PLoS Medicine* takes all potential competing interests seriously. We accept that financial competing interests are easier to define and judge, but our editorial also outlines our position that more leadership and better policy are needed in the area of non-financial competing interests. These interests include the potential biases that may emanate from the public sector cultures in which many scientists and academics work. We look forward to the continued debate on the topic of competing interests and encourage readers to respond to our recent editorial and its recommendations on our website.

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DECLARATIONS

Competing interests
None declared

References

- 1 Smith R, Feachem R, Sekhri Feachem N, Koehlmoos T, Kinlaw H. The fallacy of impartiality: competing interest in academic publications. *J R Soc Med* 2009;102:44–5
- 2 The PLoS Medicine Editors. Making sense of non-financial competing interests. *PLoS Medicine* 2008;5:e199

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Further cases of unusual triggers of sneezing

We surmised that sneezing induced by sexual ideation or orgasm may be under-reported.¹ Subsequent media coverage has led to many more members of the public stating that they also have this condition. Reports have been on the *JRSM* website,² on internet-based media fora³ or by unsolicited contact with the lead author. In total the number of people we found reporting sneezing induced by sexual ideation through these disparate methods is 146 (which includes seven doctors), with a further seven reporting

sneezing induced by orgasm. These triggers of sneezing appear to be mutually exclusive; people report either sneezing upon sexual ideation or sneezing upon orgasm. Of those reporting sneezing upon sexual ideation 112 (77%) were men, as were all seven of those reporting sneezing with orgasm, but the gender disproportion may represent sexual bias in the reporting rather than the prevalence of these conditions. Nevertheless, these figures do show that these conditions are not infrequent, and imply that perhaps thousands of people in the UK are affected; many stated that they had never discussed this phenomenon and were relieved to hear that they were not alone.

We also wish to report that two people contacted us to state that several members of their family sneeze on a full stomach; this now doubles the number of families in the medical literature reported to have this as a trigger of sneezing.¹ Interestingly, two of the people who reported sneezing on sexual ideation also admitted to a family history. One lady reported that her brother had the same phenomenon. A man reported that both his brothers and his father also had this. This implies, as we suggested in our original article, that all the unusual triggers of sneezing – light, full stomach, sexual ideation or orgasm – may be inherited in an autosomal dominant manner.

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References

- 1 Bhutta MF, Maxwell H. Sneezing induced by sexual ideation or orgasm: an under-reported phenomenon. *J R Soc Med* 2008;101:587–91
- 2 See <http://jrsm.rsmjournals.com/cgi/eletters/101/12/587> (last accessed 5 January 2009)
- 3 Website references available on request to the corresponding author

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Mentoring and the meaning of soul

I have just received my copy of *JRSM* and as usual anticipated your editorial¹ which is usually stimulating and thought-provoking. This one was no exception, but I was particularly struck by your statement that 'The medical profession has developed a siege mentality, attacked by government, betrayed by its trade union ...'.¹ By this latter remark I must presume you are referring to the BMA. I agree with you.

But as President of the Hospital Consultants and Specialists Association I would not want your readers to tarnish all Health Unions with your same brush. There is no 'one' trade union representing doctors. While the BMA may wish to speak for itself in response to your editorial, there is an alternative. The HCSA is a non-political Trade Union, and affiliated to the TUC (which the BMA is not) and represents senior hospital doctors in their daily working lives and wider professional interests.

It would be wrong to imply that Unions generally stand accused of betraying the profession. If you look at recent history you will find that we did not support the dreadful contract that most senior staff now work to, and which has done so much damage to the profession and its relationship with its patients. We advanced then, and continue to believe in, the concept of a professional contract that is work, not time, sensitive and which recognizes individual contributions doctors make. We stood alongside our junior colleagues when they marched in protest at the MMC debacle; we supported and subsidized Remedy UK when others failed to do so. We listen to the members we serve.

Yes, the profession is justified in feeling betrayed. But the profession needs to think carefully not just how this came about but what to do about it.

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DECLARATIONS

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