

The science/food industry/clinical interface

D Colquhoun

Associate Professor of Medicine, University of Queensland, Core Research Group, Wesley Medical Centre, QLD, 4066

Food choices are key factors in the causation of cardiovascular disease and many cancers. In stark contrast to the pharmaceutical industry, surprisingly there is very little traffic between the food industry and the general medical community.

The food industry includes small farmers to giant food processing companies like Nestle (food sales worldwide US\$49.4 billion in 1999) and food service companies like McDonalds (sales in US\$19.5 billion in 2000). In Australia and other developed countries production far exceeds demand and like other industries there is fierce competition at each level of the food industry. The nutrition and medical communities interact in many ways giving advice to industry regarding food product development (genetically modified food, nutraceuticals etc) and the promotion of foods or specific products and doing independent or commissioned research.

Withdrawal of government funding has resulted in greater reliance on industry for research and this influences what is investigated and how findings are presented (similar to pharmaceutical industry).(1) The interests of various food bodies may clash with nutritionists whose main concern is health and optimal nutrition. (2) In the USA lobbyists for certain food interests have successfully had politicians block publication of food guidelines and have them modified.(3)

The food industry has been successful in producing and delivering abundant food in Australia. To prevent lifestyle (largely good choice) disease we need to constructively engage the food industry to develop mutually respectful partnership between academia, government and various levels of the food industry.

For:

- (i) more research (basic and applied)
- (ii) develop new products and promote healthy eating
- (iii) support groups such as nutrition society and the National Heart Foundation (4–6)

In conclusion there needs to be far more activity between the food industry and the scientific community as our interests frequently coincide for the great health of our community.

References

1. Edwards G. Should industry sponsor research? *BMJ* 1998; 317: (7154).
2. Nestle M. Ethical dilemmas in choosing the healthful diet: vote with your fork! *Proc Nutrition Soc* 2000; 59: 619–29.
3. Nestle M. *Food politics*. University of California Press Berkeley LA 2002.
4. Inniss S, Bahlo E, Kardinaal A. Beyond implementation: the role of physicians, health care professionals and consumers in the development and use of food products. *Eur J Clin Nutrition* 1999; 53 (suppl): S25–9.
5. Asheley JM, Jarvis WT. Position statement of the American Dietetic Association: food and nutrition misinformation. *J Am Diet Assoc* 1995; 95: 705–7.
6. Crockett SJ. Food industry's role in national policy: working for the common good. *J Am Diet Assoc* 2002; 102: 478–9.