Wilmshurst Asks AHA and Circulation for Full Disclosure

Dr Peter Wilmshurst alleges in a letter forwarded to Heartwire that the American Heart Association (AHA) and the editors of its journal Circulation have failed to properly disclose conflicts of interest of some of the authors of the infamous Migraine Intervention with STARflex Technology (MIST) trial of the patent foramen ovale (PFO) closure device (1). Wilmshurst was portrayed in SWJPCC on April 27, 2012 in our Profiles of Medical Courage series (2). NMT, the now-defunct company, tried to sue Wilmshurst for alleging that NMT pushed him out of his role as investigator, manipulated some of the data to make the device's performance look better than it really was, and hid the company's relationships to some of the study's authors. Wilmshurst maintains that Circulation, which published the MIST results in 2008 (3), still must acknowledge that NMT employees and investors helped to write the paper and that none of the investigators were allowed full access to all of the MIST data.

Heartwire reports that in a letter to AHA president, Dr Gordon Tomaselli, Wilmshurst alleges "I am concerned that readers of Circulation are deceived into believing that reliance can be placed on what you publish because the American Heart Association and Circulation have rules about ethical publication that you follow….In fact, the events around the correction of the MIST trial paper show that you knowingly break your own rules, giving doctors and patients a false impression of the integrity of the research you publish, when, for example, your organization has colluded in concealment of conflicts of interest."

Contacted by Heartwire, Tomaselli redirected the request to the AHA press office, which responded: "The American Heart Association categorically rejects Dr Wilmshurst's allegation that the association or Circulation colluded to conceal conflicts of interest. The association believes it acted appropriately by publishing a detailed correction (published September 1, 2009) to the article on the MIST trial results (published March 3, 2008). The AHA is a publisher of peer-reviewed science, not an investigative body. We followed our procedure of forwarding Dr Wilmshurst's allegations to the institutions of the involved authors asking them to conduct investigations. We have remained willing to consider any new relevant substantiated information about the situation and to cooperate with any investigating body. AHA did respond to questions from the General Medical Council of UK in March and April 2011."

Contacted earlier this year on this same issue, the AHA had told Heartwire, "We consider the matter closed from the perspective of AHA's responsibility, but we would cooperate in providing our nonprivileged information if an investigation is undertaken by a university, government entity, or professional society."

References

1. http://www.theheart.org/article/1435587.do

2. Robbins RA. Profiles in medical courage: Peter Wilmshurst, the physician fugitive. Southwest J Pulm Crit Care 2012;4:134-41.
3. Dowson A, Mullen MJ, Peatfield R, Muir K, Khan AA, Wells C, et al. Migraine intervention with STARFlex Technology (MIST) trial. Circulation 2008;117:1397-404.