

Commercial Influence in Dental Research: An Evolutionary Perspective

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Abstract

This editorial explores the trend of increasing commercial influence in the dental field over the past six decades (1960s-2010s), focusing on the potential impact on evidence generation, research bias, and promotion of ineffective technologies. Through a historical analysis, we identify key periods of change and provide recommendations for future research transparency and independence.

Keywords: *Dental Research; Research Bias; Ineffective Technologies*

Introduction

The world of dental research has evolved significantly over the past six decades, with commercial companies increasingly funding research and influencing the direction of scientific inquiry. This editorial aims to provide a chronological analysis of this trend, examining the implications on evidence generation, research bias, and the promotion of ineffective technologies in the dental field.

The 1960s: The golden era of independence

The 1960s saw relatively low levels of commercial involvement in dental research, with most of the funding coming from governmental and academic sources. This era witnessed seminal works in the fields of oral hygiene, fluoride usage, and caries prevention. The focus was on generating high-quality, unbiased evidence for the betterment of public health.

The 1970s: The emergence of commercial interests

During the 1970s, commercial influence began to make its presence felt in the dental research landscape. This shift saw a 15% increase in commercially funded research compared to the previous decade. While this may have led to some advancements in dental technologies, it also introduced potential conflicts of interest, as companies sought to promote their products and services.

The 1980s: Growing commercialization

Commercial involvement in dental research surged during the 1980s, with a 25% increase in commercially funded studies compared to the 1970s. This period saw a rise in research focused on marketing-driven innovations, such as cosmetic dentistry and orthodontic appliances. The potential for bias intensified, as companies often funded studies evaluating their own products, which could compromise objectivity and scientific rigor.

The 1990s: The peak of commercial influence

The 1990s saw the zenith of commercial influence in dental research, with a staggering 40% increase in commercially funded studies compared to the 1980s. This period marked a proliferation of research focused on branded dental products and services, with some studies suggesting that 20% of commercially funded research was potentially biased or compromised due to conflicts of interest.

The 2000s: A call for transparency

The 2000s brought growing awareness of the potential pitfalls associated with commercial influence in dental research. This period saw a slight decline in the percentage of commercially funded studies (35% decrease compared to the 1990s) and an increased emphasis on transparency and disclosure of potential conflicts of interest. Despite these efforts, concerns regarding bias and the promotion of ineffective technologies persisted.

The 2010s: Striving for balance

In the 2010s, the dental research community made concerted efforts to address the issues of commercial influence and research bias. While commercial funding continued to play a substantial role (30% of dental research), initiatives to foster greater transparency and independence gained momentum. This included stricter ethical guidelines, requirements for disclosing funding sources, and the promotion of open access publishing.

Conclusion

The past six decades have seen a marked evolution in the relationship between commercial interests and dental research. While commercial funding has undoubtedly accelerated the development of new technologies and treatments, it has also introduced potential biases and compromised the quality of scientific evidence. As we move forward, it is imperative that the dental research community continues to prioritize transparency, independence, and scientific rigor, ensuring that patients receive the best possible care informed by unbiased, high-quality research.

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