

Scientific Panel  
MindFreedom Support Coalition International  
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16 April 2004

Cathryn M. Clary, MD, MBA, Vice President  
Psychiatry, Neurology, Consumer & Markets Development  
Pfizer Global Pharmaceuticals  
235 E. 42nd St 235/10/30  
New York, NY 10017

Dear Dr. Clary:

David Oaks, Executive Director of Mind Freedom Support Coalition International, has asked the Coalition's Scientific Panel\* to reply to your letter of 17 February 2004. Your letter was a response to Mr. Oaks' letter of 9 December 2003 to Dr. Henry A McKinnell. In that letter, Mr. Oaks informed Dr. McKinnell of his complaint to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and Federal Trade Commission (FTC) that, in its advertisements for Zoloft, Pfizer makes the following statement which is not supported by scientific evidence: **"Zoloft is a medicine that helps correct the chemical imbalance of serotonin in the brain."**

In your letter you state that "neurochemical disruptions are the biological substrate of major depressive disorder." We are fully aware that you believe this statement to be true. Pfizer representatives, salespeople, marketing brochures, textbook authors, etc. have stated this belief numerous times. We did not ask for a restatement of this belief. In his letter Mr. Oaks complained that there was no scientific evidence to support such a statement.

The only supporting citation you provide in your letter is a textbook chapter. The problem with textbooks is that they are not held to the same standard as peer-reviewed papers. In addition, editors of scientific journals require authors to submit a statement describing potential conflicts of interest, which is not the case with textbook chapters. If the *Textbook of Psychopharmacology* which you cite had been held to the same standard as medical journals, readers would know that one of the editors, Charles Nemeroff, has been a major stockholder in Pfizer. They would also know that the book is published by the American Psychiatric Press, an arm of the American Psychiatric Association, which receives large financial contributions from Pfizer.

But conflicts of interest aside, the chapter you cite provides no evidence to back up your statement that mental illness results from a chemical imbalance.

We agree with the authors that SSRI's such as Zoloft radically alter serotonin transmission and create other consequences such as serotonin downregulation (cell loss) by blocking serotonin reuptake. That has been scientifically demonstrated. But to say that such alterations "re-regulate the neurochemical disruptions that are the biological substrate of Major Depressive Disorder" is to resort to advertising slogan, not science. The word "disruption" connotes abnormality or disorder. But neither you nor the chapter you cite presents evidence that anyone has established what the normal, ordered or balanced biochemistry of the brain is. In the absence of such evidence, the word "disruption" is bombast, not science. In the absence of such evidence, the word "disruption" can only be used to describe the effects of Zoloft and similar drugs on brain neurotransmission.

We also don't agree with your implication that it is possible at this time to determine the threshold between the level of emotions such as anxiety and sadness which are functional and useful and levels of such emotions which are excessive and "disordered."

In short, we find that your response is not a valid or sufficient reply to Mr. Oaks' complaint that, in its advertising, Pfizer states that Zoloft is a medicine that helps correct the "chemical imbalance" of serotonin in the brain, a statement which is completely unsupported by scientific evidence. We take your failure to supply even one citation of a peer-reviewed scientific article as a tacit admission that there is indeed no evidence to support that statement.

If anything we have said is not correct, we would appreciate your sending us evidence of that being the case, if possible within the next 30 days.

Sincerely,

Fred Baughman, MD  
Mary Boyle, PhD  
David Cohen, PhD  
Ty Colbert, PhD  
Pat Deegan, PhD  
Al Galves, PhD  
Thomas Greening, PhD  
Keith Hoeller, PhD  
David Jacobs, PhD  
Jay Joseph, PhD  
Bruce Levine, PhD  
Loren Mosher, MD  
Stuart Shipko, MD

\* The Scientific Panel is a group of psychiatrists and psychologists which was established to review scientific evidence requested from the American Psychiatric Association, The National Alliance for the Mentally Ill and the Surgeon General of the United States by the MindFreedom hunger strikers in August of 2003.