

Editorial Note

In 1999, this journal published a paper by Professor Rylander *et al.*,¹ from the University of Gothenburg, on the characteristics of non-smoking females living with smoking males. In the letter accompanying this submission, Professor Rylander stated that 'No part of the research presented has been funded by sources that might lead to a conflict of interest'. We now know that this statement was untrue and that it had been funded by an organization that itself was financed almost exclusively by tobacco companies. These events have been catalogued previously in this journal and elsewhere,²⁻⁴ and we now have a much better understanding of the complex and wide-ranging nature of Professor Rylander's involvement with the tobacco industry.⁵

We have now received the report of an investigation into Professor Rylander's actions, conducted by the University of Geneva, where he undertook some of his work (<http://www.prevention.ch/rye060904.pdf>). The University has requested that we, and other journals that have published some of his papers, should print the following statement:

Based on the extensive evidence that has come to light in the aftermath of lawsuits against cigarette manufacturers in the US, Prof. Rylander cannot be considered to be an independent researcher as regards tobacco issues because of his longstanding and largely secret links with the tobacco industry. Many items of correspondence between Prof. Rylander and Philip Morris scientists, as well as lawyers representing the tobacco industry, show that Prof. Rylander hardly took any initiative in the tobacco area without extensive consultation with industry. Prof. Rylander's epidemiological studies on the effects of environmental tobacco smoke followed industry's leads and were meant to support a sceptical message on the effects of passive smoke, in line with an industry-defined strategy.

In his following capacities, Prof. Rylander's work reflects his position as an industry agent rather than as a free scientist:

- provider of expert advice on second-hand smoke, in particular to the US Environmental Protection Agency;

- organiser of scientific meetings on second-hand smoking;
- agent of influence towards the University of Hong-Kong, where he tried to lobby for the promotion of another scientist linked to cigarette manufacturers, in an attempt to provide the tobacco industry with an academic platform in Asia.

Prof. Rylander's work on the effects of environmental tobacco smoke raises severe suspicions since the author hid relevant conflict of interest and cannot be considered an independent scientist. Finally, it must be noted that the inquiry was not concerned about Prof. Rylander's opinions on second-hand smoking qua opinions. Rather, it concluded that Prof. Rylander was guilty of scientific misconduct in hiding the real extent of his links with the tobacco industry and in aligning his activity as a scientific investigator and expert with the strategic objectives of his industrial sponsors. For the University of Geneva (through the Rector André Hurst), this represents a serious breach of the integrity that the scientific community and the public can and do expect of a university scientist.

References

- 1 Rylander R, Axelsson G, Mégevand Y, et al. Dietary habits for non-smoking females living with smokers or non-smokers. *Eur J Public Health* 1999;9:142-5.
- 2 McKee M. Smoke and mirrors: clearing the air to expose the tactics of the tobacco industry. *Eur J Public Health* 2000;10:161-3.
- 3 McKee M. Competing interests: the importance of transparency. *Eur J Public Health* 2003;13:193-4.
- 4 Malka S, Gregori M. *Infiltration: Une taupe au service de Philip Morris*. Geneva: Editions Georg, 2005.
- 5 Diethelm PA, Rielle J-C, McKee M. The whole truth and nothing but the truth? The research that Philip Morris did not want you to see. *Lancet* 2005;366:86-92.