

THE NATION'S NEWSPAPER



USA TODAY

NO. 1 IN THE USA . . . FIRST IN DAILY READERS

4D • WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 1997 • USA TODAY

HEALTH

Study links researchers to money

By Tim Friend
USA TODAY

SEATTLE — A study of 1,000 scientists who published their findings in major scientific journals shows at least a third had a financial stake in their research.

The study, reported at a meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, is the first to link the commercialization of science to published articles, says science policy expert Sheldon Krimsky, Tufts University, Boston.

Krimsky cited a recent report in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* showing that zinc lozenges shorten the duration of a cold. The lead scientist became embroiled in a highly publicized controversy because he owned stock in the lozenge company and made \$145,000 by selling stock the day the article appeared. Although the scientist had informed the journal of his stock holdings, the journal did not make the financial interest public.

To learn whether such potential conflicts of interest were common, Krimsky and colleagues examined research by 1,000 Massachusetts scientists listed as lead authors on studies in 14 scientific and medical journals.

He found that 34% of the scientists had a financial interest, such as holding a patent on their discovery or be-

ing affiliated with a biotechnology company involved in commercializing it. Although the study looked only at Massachusetts researchers, Krimsky says the situation is comparable to other states with a great deal of biomedical research and links between universities and industry.

"No one says scientists don't have the right to consult or join companies, but let that information be known," he says. Some leading journals have begun requiring scientists to disclose financial ties to their discoveries, and the federal government requires scientists to disclose ties involving projects that are publicly funded.

Still, Michael Shapiro, law professor at the University of Southern California, Los Angeles, says the public may have to accept some trade-offs. Research costs have grown so high that scientists look not just to government but to private industry for funding.

A conflict of interest raises the risk of some research being steered, consciously or unconsciously, to incorrect conclusions. But full disclosure also brings a greater need to have expensive studies replicated to remove doubt that financial interests played a part. And that could "put a crimp" on the total volume of science performed.

"You can look for optimal solutions, but never come up with a solution that is perfect" in providing both credibility and adequate support, he says.