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You oughta be congratulated?

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TO THE EDITOR: We write to express our concern at the publication of the recent supplement "Essential role of fats throughout the lifecycle", adorned by the sponsor's logo.¹ It was an interesting counterpoint to an accompanying article in the main journal regarding the need for industry-academia collaborations to "strike a balance".² While the issue of relationships between industry and doctors is complex, and few of us are truly independent, the publication of such a branded document is disquieting. Directed sponsorship, beyond mere advertising, undermines the credibility of such supplements and the Journal itself, regardless of the authors' expertise, objectivity and the importance of the topic. Unfortunately, we are left with the taste that this is a spread designed to butter us up.

- Gibson RA, editor. Essential role of fats throughout the lifecycle. *Med J Aust* 2002; 176 (Suppl 3 June): S105-S124.
- Moses H, Perumpanani A, Nicholson J. Collaborating with industry: choices for Australian medicine and universities. *Med J Aust* 2002; 176: 543-546. □

Martin B Van Der Weyden

Editor, *The Medical Journal of Australia*,
Locked Bag 3030, Strawberry Hills, NSW 2012.
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IN REPLY: "Oh what a feeling" to receive a congratulatory letter! But the euphoria was short lived, as, on closer inspection, congratulations turned to castigation. The offending event was the Journal's publication of an industry-supported supplement,¹ and its practice of branding supplements with the logos of their sponsoring bodies.

Although sponsorship by government agencies or non-profit health organisations rarely provokes comment, industry sponsorship is another matter. As industry support for research and other health-related activities will inevitably increase in the future, we at the Journal are pleased that Padiglione and colleagues have aired their anxiety.

Irrespective of the source of sponsorship, the Journal's policy governing the publica-

tion of supplements follows the recommendations of the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors.² These include that:

- the journal's editor must take full responsibility for policies, practices and content of supplements, must approve the appointment of the editors of supplements, and must retain the authority to reject articles; and
- the source of funding should be clearly stated and prominently located in supplements, preferably on each page.

To these principles the Journal has added its own requirements.³ These include the need for peer review and that editors of and contributors to supplements declare competing interests and compensations. These were clearly identified on the title page of the offending publication.¹

For our readers, the Journal is the bread and its supplements the butter. One can always refuse to taste the butter. But, for those who hanker after a little fat, we aim to ensure, through churning by external peer review and transparent sponsorship of the product, that "butter is better".

- Gibson RA, editor. Essential role of fats throughout the lifecycle. *Med J Aust* 2002; 176 (Suppl 3 June): S105-S124.
- International Committee of Medical Journal Editors. Uniform requirements for manuscripts submitted to biomedical journals and separate statements <http://www.mja.com.au/public/information_uniform.html> (accessed 9 September 2002).
- MJA policy on sponsored supplements <<http://www.mja.com.au/public/information/supplements.html>> (accessed 11 September 2002). □

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