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Subject: NPR's On The Media and The Infinite Mind

## NPR's On The Media and The Infinite Mind

In the wake of the November 22, 2008 New York Times article, which revealed Dr. Fred Goodwin, former host of public radio's "The Infinite Mind," had received \$1.3 million for lecturing on behalf of a pharmaceutical company, NPR has continued to distance itself from the problem and has used its airwaves and web site to unfairly blame "The Infinite Mind's" producers for the situation.

Most recent is a November 28, 2008 segment on NPR's "On The Media," that purports to report on "The Infinite Mind" controversy. However, the "On The Media" broadcast itself failed when it comes to four basic journalistic standards, troubling for a national public radio program that prides itself on covering the press.

First, despite the intense controversy surrounding this important matter, neither I, as executive producer, nor any of the senior producers of "The Infinite Mind" were contacted by "On The Media," invited to be on the segment, or asked to respond to the criticism leveled at us by NPR in the show.

Second, the reporting in the segment relies on an unnamed, anonymous source, undoubtedly a disgruntled former "The Infinite Mind" employee, who previously worked for "On The Media."

Third, "On The Media" is produced for NPR by radio station WNYC/New York, but the report, critical of "The Infinite Mind," failed to disclose that for nine years "The Infinite Mind" was "produced in association" with WNYC, an affiliation contained in the credits of each week's "The Infinite Mind" show.

Finally, the report on NPR's "On The Media" relied solely on one guest (with a brief appearance by Senator Charles Grassley). That guest was NPR's media correspondent, David Folkenflik. Even though Folkenflik was aware, he failed to reveal that Dr. Fred Goodwin had appeared as a guest expert on various NPR programs from All Things Considered to Talk of the Nation, discussing medication studies. In these stories, NPR identified Dr. Goodwin to its listeners only as a professor, public radio host, and former government official. In none of these cases did NPR make any reference to the fact that Dr. Goodwin had connections to

the pharmaceutical industry. NPR was apparently in the dark, as were we.

The issue of disclosure goes well beyond Dr. Goodwin.

Dr. Charles Nemeroff, one of the three major psychiatrists being investigated by Senator Charles Grassley for taking and not disclosing more than one million dollars in pharmaceutical fees, appeared on NPR's All Things Considered in June 2008 and previously on NPR's Morning Edition discussing research on the positive aspects of antidepressants for children. In neither case, was his relationship to the pharmaceutical industry disclosed by NPR, and he was identified only as a "psychiatrist" and "research scientist."

Additionally, Dr. Joseph Biederman, the leading Harvard child psychiatrist who is also under investigation by Senator Grassley for not disclosing pharmaceutical consulting fees, appeared in a New York Times article on November 23, 2006, entitled "Proof is Scant on Psychiatric Drug Mix for Young." The article was written by New York Times reporter Gardiner Harris (the same Gardiner Harris who wrote the New York Times article critical of "The Infinite Mind"). In the New York Times article, Dr. Biederman was quoted as defending multiple psychiatric drug therapies for kids ("These drugs have revolutionized how we treat severe psychopathology in children," said Biederman.) However, neither Dr. Biederman's relationship to the pharmaceutical industry nor his pharmaceutical consulting fees of at least \$1.6 million between 2000 and 2007 were disclosed by Gardiner Harris in his New York Times article. (See: <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/23/health/23kids.html> )

With regard to "The Infinite Mind," the fact remains that the producers of the program were not made aware by Dr. Goodwin of a single instance in which he was paid by a pharmaceutical company to speak on their behalf. We have consulted with counsel, and we will take appropriate legal action if Dr. Goodwin continues to maintain that he informed us or that we were aware.

As I wrote recently, when these sorts of transgressions occur in newsrooms, everyone wonders how it was possible that no one knew. The best that can be done in response is not to point fingers, but to look critically at what went wrong, how it happened, and to find ways of preventing it in the future.

-- Bill Lichtenstein

