

## Student Welfare Department

Report

on

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Organized by

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## Summary Report of Monthly Seminar Series

The growing commercialization of research with its effect on the ethical conduct of researchers, and the advancement of scientific knowledge with its effect on the welfare or otherwise of patients, are areas of pressing concern today and need a serious, thorough study. Biomedical research, and its forward march, is becoming increasingly dependent on industry-academia proximity, both commercial and geographic. A realization of the commercial value of academic biomedical research coupled with its rapid and efficient utilization by industry is the major propelling force here. A number of well-intentioned writers in the field look to the whole development with optimism. But this partnership is a double-edged sword, for it carries with it the potential of an exciting future as much as the prospect of misappropriation and malevolence. Moreover, such partnerships have sometimes eroded public trust in the research enterprise itself. Connected to the growing clout of industry in institutions is concern about the commercialization of research and resolving the 'patient or product' loyalty. There is ambivalence about industry funding and influence in academia, and a consequent 'approach-avoidance' conflict. If academia has to provide the patients and research talent, industry necessarily has to provide the finances and other facilities based on it. This is an invariable and essential agreement between the two parties that they can walk out of only at their own peril. The profound ethical concerns that industry funded research has brought center-stage need a close look, especially as they impact patients, research subjects, public trust, marketability of products, and research and professional credibility. How can the intermediate goal of industry (patient welfare) serve the purpose of the final goal of academia is the basic struggle for conscientious research institutions /associations. And how best the goal of maximizing profits can be best served, albeit suitably camouflaged as patient welfare throughout, is the concern of the pharmaceutical industry. A very great potential conflict of interest lies in the fact that academia needs the sophisticated instruments that only big funding can provide, while at the same time resists the attempts of the fund provider to set the agenda of research, protocol, design, publication, the works. Conflicts arise at many steps and levels of functioning, and are related to the expectations, competing interests, and conflicting priorities of the different entities involved, whether they are the academic medical centers, the funding agencies, the patients and their families, or the investors and venture capitalists.

The public expects access to new treatments. Its appetite for innovation has been bolstered by the constant attention given by the press to new treatments and by the implicit promise from researchers of continuing advances. Similarly, patients demand privacy and control over information about themselves. It makes greater sense for genuine researchers to associate with large long-term industry players who have a track record of genuine hard-core discoveries, even if the process is slow (maybe), and the funding less (may not be). The element of control venture capitalists exert over the pharmaceutical industry is an under researched area for obvious reasons. But it needs further probing, for that will lay bare the pulls and pressures under which industry works. It makes sense for ethically minded researchers and institutions not to fall in the trap of stocks and equity investments in industry, howsoever attractive they appear, and get rid of them as soon as possible if they have them. If at all they want, it makes more sense to own stocks of larger well established concerns, for the stock upheavals being less, the pressure of the market-place, and of venture sharks, is likely to be lower too. While active participation by the researcher in the commercialization process may be greatly desired by industry, ostensibly in the name of creating value, academia must realize it is a bait it might find hard to swallow in the long run. It makes more sense for the researcher and institution to forego such temptations and/or walk out of such investments as soon as possible.