

Dr. Blackburn

Hand Carried
3/13 TW

Corresp. Moore

Selling a Healthy Public

Unlike the rest of the health sciences, the field of public health usually enters the technology transfer debate *after* a product or process has entered the marketplace. The issue then becomes "information transfer," improving the public's well-being by publicizing the health implications and safety of industrial products and practices. The School of Public Health's ^{projected} new Center for Partnerships in Health Promotion is making sure that when academia and industry talk, the public listens--and benefits.

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Traditionally, the School of Public Health has avoided support from industry, says Henry Blackburn, professor and head of the Division of Epidemiology. "We were approached because of work in our laboratory in the 1960s that demonstrated the cholesterol-lowering effect of vegetable oils. The vegetable oil companies were very eager to give us money, but we made a categorical decision that we would accept no money from food companies. We didn't like the idea of our research being controlled and that our academic freedom in choosing where the research was going to go ^{might} be influenced." We also, in Epidemiology, wanted to be entirely free of any association with food groups or products, to maintain the School's credibility in public policy for nutrition.

Blackburn continues to refuse industrial funding for basic epidemiological research. But he agrees that the time has come for public health professionals to collaborate with industry to make sure that the results of that research are publicized accurately and responsibly. "We need to be sure that the right messages are being presented to the public. The School of Public Health and its faculty need to take public health stands; we cannot be in an ivory tower," he says.

Taking a stand in a professional journal or in testimony to Congress, however, is seldom as effective as taking a stand in product advertising or merchandising, which requires cooperating with industry. "We've deliberately ^{collaborated} ~~gotten into bed~~ with the beef industry after them fighting us for years, because we found that through a joint educational project we really could get people to buy the leanest cuts of meat and prepare them in a healthier way," Blackburn says.

That's the kind of cooperative effort the School envisions for its new center, which will pursue professional and public education, health promotion, and disease prevention efforts with industry. Blackburn is chairman of a committee

Hope you will allow
this change in tone.
Thanks.

the message of quality
of which we could
control,

charged with drafting guidelines for those interactions, to make sure that product information does not become or appear as product endorsement.

"The credibility of our stand depends entirely on the credibility of our institution. And if we know that a faculty member ^{or an institution} ~~is employed by or~~ has a vested interest in a company, or a product, or an industry--it's a problem," he says. "Some people don't realize the chilling effect ^{on their freedom} and the credibility effect; ^{on their opinions;} they think that if they're personally honest and their motives are good, that they're incorruptible. Well, it's much more subtle than corruption. Its a chilling effect on ^{public} statements and it's the credibility of the institution that ^{suffers even from the} gets lost. Once you go down ^{that} ~~this~~ trail, I don't know how you come back."

Blackburn's committee is ^{trying to} blaze a different trail, one that encourages faculty-industry collaborations but that ^{recommends oversight of} ~~oversees~~ funding and maintains project control within the School. "There are safeguards in peer review, ^{and control of contracts;} there are safeguards in looking at whole categories of products rather than individual products, and there are safeguards ^{if} in the basic motivation ^{is} to develop knowledge," he says.

The Center itself is self-administered housed in the Division of Human Development and Nutrition. This should be mentioned. Also the main actors R. Mellis + J. Himes should be mentioned.

appearance of conflict of interest.

We are not in oversight committee, but we will recommend one.

and promote the public health, not personal gain,