

Wakefield's Shill: Responding to Martin J. Walker

By David N. Brown

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One of the greatest ironies about the autism/anti-vax movement is that they refer to opponents virtually by reflex as “Pharma shills”, yet they themselves show more characteristics of “shills” than any of their opponents. One would be hard-pressed to find an offender more egregious than The Fraud himself, Andrew Wakefield. He complains of conflicts of interest, censorship and outright conspiracies. But he accepted half a million pounds for his failed attempts to find a link between autism and MMR. He not only holds a patent for a vaccine, but started a scare about established competitors to that vaccine. He has repeatedly resorted to lawsuits and other harassment against those who criticize him. And he has at least one of his very own paid shills, one Martin J. Walker. Walker has struck again, this time in the US via the Age of Autism post, “The UK GMC Panel: A Sinister and Tawdry Hearing” I found the following comments especially interesting:

“The complainant in this case, was, as most of you know, a journalist, who has never appeared as a witness and has remained a 'secret' accuser; his interests, funding and the reasons for his previous writing in support of the vaccine manufacturers has remained concealed. “

Walker obviously is referring to Brian Deer, in a rehash of claims he has been making since 2007. Unfortunately (for Walker), none of his allegations appear to be supported by a single piece of evidence, and are contradicted by all evidence and testimony readily at hand. First and foremost, while Deer's reporting was obviously a major if not crucial factor in the decision to prosecute Wakefield, there is no evidence that he took any part in the formal filing of charges, and both he and the GMC have denied that he did. Furthermore, Deer does say that he was approached by the GMC after prosecution was begun, a claim which the GMC does not dispute, so his participation in the trial can be considered real and a matter of record. Finally, as to the matter of funding, Deer stated some time ago, “Apart from [a cheque](#) I received from Wakefield's lawyers, on his behalf, my investigation has been financed solely by Times Newspapers Ltd and Channel 4 Television.” He has also opined, “Walker hints I'm on the take *because he is.*”

“(R)egardless of a verdict of guilt or innocent they have undoubtedly smeared and destroyed the name of one of the most consistent, socially minded medical researchers of his generation...”

Reality: Wakefield was an undistinguished researcher who appears to have been under some suspicion before his 1998 paper and experiencing *de facto* marginalization well before 2004. (See “Wakefield THE FRAUD”.) Regardless of a verdict of “guilt or innocent” (sic!), reputable scientists, institutions and publications will continue to avoid, censor or openly condemn any original research from him.

“Most people do not know for instance that a number of GMC prosecutions are organised by and arrive at the GMC via Medico-Legal Investigations, a company solely financed by the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industries that sometimes uses journalists to report their cases.”

This claim has no apparent basis in verifiable fact. Indeed, it is conveniently unclear what Walker wishes to say: that MLI contributes to some GMC proceedings, that they did so in the Wakefield case,

and or that they contributed to Deer's investigation? According to Brian Deer, “MLI played no role at all in my investigation, let alone a "leading part", as Walker invents... (T)o my knowledge, MLI played no role whatsoever in preparing the GMC case against Wakefield.” If Walker desires to argue to the contrary, he has an obligation to do so clearly, and to provide whatever evidence and arguments he believes will support this conclusion. It can be added that [Medico-Legal Investigations](#) requests payments for subscriptions and services, and thus is obviously not “financed solely” by ABPI or any other single entity.

“ in Dr Wakefield's case, the complainant was journalist Brian Deer, the only person in the world to lodge a formal complaint against Dr Wakefield. “

This simply repeats the false claim that Deer made a formal complaint, and compounds the falsehood by claiming no one else did! Obviously, if there were really no complainant other than Deer, the GMC hearings would never have begun.

“In 2009, the owner of the Sunday Times, James Murdoch was given a place as a non-executive Director on the board of GlaxoSmithKline the MMR vaccine manufacturers.”

This is obviously an ad hominem argument, and at least technically a false one: James Murdoch is NOT the Times' owner, his father Rupert is. Even apart from these problems, this has no relevance to Deer's investigation. An arguable conflict of interest as of 2009 obviously does not apply to news stories published five years earlier.

“the GMC brought the prosecution, hired and paid the prosecuting counsel, the jury and the jury chairman (a one time holder of shares in GlaxoSmithKline) and the legal advisor to the panel, that they administered the trial and held it on their own premises.”

For the most part, this is nothing more or less than a statement of the obvious. The remark about “their own premises” appears especially redundant; where else would the GMC hold its hearings, Trafalgar Square? But in the midst of it is another ad hominem attack, about which it is suspicious that Walker not only fails to supply any evidence but even a name of whom is being accused. The lack of identification logically suggests that Walker is making a claim he knows is false, but leaving out a name as a deterrent to fact-checking and/or a libel suit. As far as I can determine, he is referring to Dr. Surendra Kumar, whose formal post is as *chairman of the panel* hearing the charges against Wakefield. I was altogether surprised to find [confirmation](#) that Kumar was a GSK stockholder at around the time the the GMC investigation was initiated. So why did Walker decline to provide information sufficient either to support his claim or make it easy to seek confirmation? Perhaps this is his way of making it harder to recognize when he is lying!

“Charges were first muted (sic!) in 2004, the year that the claim of over 1,000 parents against three vaccine manufacturers, that had been proceeding over ten years, was suddenly denied legal aid. The Appeal against the withdrawal of legal aid was heard by a judge whose brother was a non-executive director of GlaxoSmithKline and the managing director of Elsevier, publishers of the Lancet.”

Once again, Smith presents an ad hominem argument without offering evidence or even the name of the accused. He probably means Mr. Justice Davis, whom, contrary to a straightforward understanding of Walker's words and his brother Crispin Henry Lamert Davis. It appears, once again contrary to natural suspicions, that the claims are true for the time in question. But there are a number of errors and omissions. The withdrawal of Legal Aid Services funding did not deny all legal aid; the litigation

could have continued with private funding, *which should have been readily available if the case had a reasonable chance of leading to a court victory*. Furthermore, that decision was made, and upheld by the Funding Review committee (including a barrister), in 2003. The 2004 ruling merely affirmed that decision. Finally, Crispin Davis's position at Elsevier was irrelevant to the situation then current, as the ruling made no judgment about the validity of Wakefield's paper.

It can be added, on altogether the most fundamental level, that it is unlikely that a favorable ruling by Davis would have made much difference in the fate of the lawsuit (or, to put it more accurately, attempt at a lawsuit). As I understand it (from admittedly brief and limited inquiries), acceptance or rejection of an appeal, in UK law, simply determines whether the High Court will hear a case. Hence, if Davis had accepted the appeal, MMR litigators could still have lost their case. Even if they had won, it is not clear to me what that would have meant. Assuming (as a best case scenario) that the High Court had the authority and inclination to order the Legal Aid Services to provide further funding for the litigation, what good would that have done? There was clearly a strong consensus within the commission for shutting down the MMR litigation. If they had been kept from doing this officially, they could have achieved much the same end by delays, obstruction, or simply by giving a token sum too small to accomplish anything with. And even if the funding had continued unabated, what then? A decade of work and 15 million pounds in public funding (plus, I am sure, a goodly sum in private funds) could not produce work good enough to go to trial, let alone win a case. More money and time would only have produced more of the same, which was all the reason the commission needed to cut off funding.

Dr Wakefield was to have been an expert witness for the parents at trial, the GMC hearing has meant that he will no longer be countenanced as an expert witness in Britain and will find it impossible to get funding for further research.

This represents a further attempt to tie the failure of the MMR litigation, Brian Deer's expose and the prosecution of Wakefield together in a grand unified conspiracy theory. But it conflicts with everything that can be known. At the start of 2004, all the real issues had been decided. The MMR litigation had already had its funding cut, without ever coming close to a trial. Wakefield's autism/MMR study was already generally disregarded as flawed and irreproducible, and he was already losing what status he had among his peers. As usual for "anti-vax" writers, Walker is rationalizing after the fact and blaming everyone and everything but himself and his flawed ideas.

I could almost feel sorry for Mr. Walker. It is not improbable that he is mentally ill. Worse, he is under the sway of Wakefield, even though the "doctor" has proven he has no regard for his well-being. Witness Wakefield's decision in late 2008 to denounce Walker's attacks on Kumar. That Walker was defending Wakefield, had been paid by him, and probably provided with many of his false claims by him made no difference to the "doctor". As soon as he became a liability, Wakefield turned against them. While this dysfunctional relationship appears to have survived, there can be little doubt that the "doctor" is perfectly willing to treat him much worse, and abandon him for good if necessary. Such is the way of a narcissistic sociopath.

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