

# NEWS IN BRIEF

## US STUDY SEES POSSIBLE BIAS IN COMPANY-FUNDED STATIN CLINICAL TRIALS

Reuters highlighted a research paper by Bero et al (*PLoS Med* 4(6): e184. doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.0040184) which appeared to show clinical trials comparing cholesterol-lowering drugs to one another are far more likely to yield results favouring the one whose maker paid for the research, thus appearing to indicate bias in company-sponsored studies. Lisa Bero of the University of California-San Francisco and her team analysed the results of 192 trials assessing statins. Of these 192 clinical trials, 95 were funded by industry. Studies that produced favourable results toward a given statin were more than 20 times as likely to have been funded by that drug's manufacturer rather than the company that made the drug to which it was being compared. Bero said the findings raise suspicions that some drug companies may be manipulating the design and interpretation of trials to get results that can boost sales of a product. Reuters also reported that the Deputy Vice President for regulatory affairs for the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America defended the integrity of the trials.

(Source: Reuters)

## FDA TO FORM PANEL TO ADVISE ON COMMUNICATING RISKS OF DRUGS AND MEDICAL DEVICES

*CBC News* reported that the US FDA would form an advisory committee of outside experts to help people understand the risks and benefits of medicines and devices. The FDA had issued a press release on 4 June 2007 (<http://www.fda.gov/bbs/topics/NEWS/2007/NEW01648.html>) that the Risk Communication Advisory Committee would (a) help FDA better understand the communication needs and priorities of the general public; (b) advise FDA on the development of strategic plans to communicate product risks and benefits; and (c) make recommendations to FDA on what current research suggests about crafting risk and benefit messages, as well as how to most effectively communicate specific product information to vulnerable audiences. The FDA's

acting deputy commissioner for policy said that communication is essential in helping consumers and healthcare professionals make information decisions. The FDA said it is creating the committee because it agreed with a 2006 report from the US Institute of Medicine (*NB: The Future of Drug Safety: Promoting and Protecting the Health of the Public*) that recommended a new drug safety communications panel. The members of the 15 panel committee would come from the fields of risk communication, social marketing, health literacy, journalism and bioethics. Consumers, patients, caregivers and health professionals may also be included. *CBC News* said that the formation of this committee came amid lingering concerns about drug safety monitoring following the recall of the Vioxx in 2004, and as the US Congress prepares to debate why the FDA did not warn people about possible heart risks linked to the diabetes drug Avandia (*NB: N Engl J Med.* 2007 May 21; Rosiglitazone and Cardiovascular Risk. Psaty BM, Furberg CD).

(Source: *CBC News*)

## KIDS ON WHEELS COULD ROLL INTO HOSPITAL

Heeling, which refers to kids zipping through crowds on wheeled sneakers, could cause fractures and dislocations. The report quoted an article in the journal *Pediatrics* (*NB: PEDIATRICS* Vol. 119 No. 6 June 2007, pp. e1294-e1298), where over a 10-week period last summer, 67 children were treated for injuries from Heelys or strap-on wheels called Street Gliders at Temple Street Children's University Hospital in Dublin, Ireland. The article quoted an article from Singapore which reported that 36 children had been treated for injuries during a seven-month period in 2004 (*NB: SMJ* 2006 47(5):373-5). It was noted that The American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons would be issuing new safety advice that recommends helmets, wrist protectors and knee and elbow pads for kids who wear wheeled shoes. Heelys, a company manufacturing one of the more popular brands, said in April that a study it commissioned shows that their shoes have a safer injury rate than skateboarding, inline skating and even swimming. ■

(Source: *Associated Press*)