

HOME PAGE MY TIMES TODAY'S PAPER VIDEO MOST POPULAR TIMES TOPICS

My Account Welcome, dafam Log Out Help

**The New York Times** **Business**  **Ameriprise Financial**

Business  All NYT

WORLD U.S. N.Y. / REGION BUSINESS TECHNOLOGY SCIENCE HEALTH SPORTS OPINION ARTS STYLE TRAVEL JOBS REAL ESTATE AUTOS

MEDIA & ADVERTISING WORLD BUSINESS SMALL BUSINESS YOUR MONEY DEALBOOK MARKETS RESEARCH MUTUAL FUNDS MY PORTFOLIO ALERTS

**BALLY'S ATLANTIC CITY** GREAT RATES BOOK NOW The Ultimate Place to Stay & Play! **BALLY'S ATLANTIC CITY** \*RESTRICTIONS APPLY

## Merck Wrote Drug Studies for Doctors

By **STEPHANIE SAUL**  
Published: April 16, 2008

The drug maker [Merck](#) drafted dozens of research studies for a best-selling drug, then lined up prestigious doctors to put their names on the reports before publication, according to an article to be published Wednesday in a leading medical journal.

### Related

JAMA Article: "Guest Authorship and Ghostwriting in Publications Related to Rofecoxib"

Blogrunner: Reactions From Around the Web

The article, based on documents unearthed in lawsuits over the pain drug [Vioxx](#), provides a rare, detailed look in the industry practice of ghostwriting medical research studies that are then published in academic journals.

The article cited one draft of a Vioxx research study that was still in want of a big-name researcher, identifying the lead writer only as "External author?"

Vioxx was a best-selling drug before Merck took it off the market in 2004 over evidence linking it to heart attacks. Last fall, the company agreed to a \$4.85 billion settlement to resolve tens of thousands of lawsuits filed by former Vioxx patients or their families.

The lead author of Wednesday's article, Dr. Joseph S. Ross of the Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York, said a close look at the Merck documents raised broad questions about the validity of much of the drug industry's published research, because the ghostwriting practice appears to be widespread.

"It almost calls into question all legitimate research that's been conducted by the pharmaceutical industry with the academic physician," said Dr. Ross, whose article, written with colleagues, was published Wednesday in [JAMA](#), The Journal of the [American Medical Association](#), and posted Tuesday on the journal's Web site.

Merck acknowledged on Tuesday that it sometimes hired outside medical writers to draft research reports before handing them over to the doctors whose names eventually appear on the publication. But the company disputed the article's conclusion that the authors do little of the actual research or analysis.

The final work is the product of the doctor and "accurately reflects his or her opinion," said a Merck lawyer, James C. Fitzpatrick.

And at least one of the doctors whose published research was questioned in Wednesday's article, Dr. Steven H. Ferris, a [New York University psychiatry](#) professor, said the notion that the article bearing his name was ghostwritten was "simply false." He said it was "egregious" that Dr. Ross and his colleagues had done no research besides mining the Merck documents and reading the published journal articles.

In an editorial, [JAMA](#) said the analysis showed that Merck had apparently manipulated dozens of publications to promote Vioxx.

[More Articles in Business »](#)

### Great Getaways - Travel Deals by E-Mail



Sign up for travel offers from NYTimes.com's premier advertisers. [See Sample](#)  
**dahr27-cinci@yahoo.com**   
[Change E-mail Address](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)

**Live and Learn** [CLICK HERE >>](#)

60 seconds is all it takes to get free degree info.

**University of Phoenix**  
Thinking ahead.

University of Phoenix live for today, learn for tomorrow

### MOST POPULAR - BUSINESS

1. [The Food Chain: Shortages Threaten Farmers' Key Tool: Fertilizer](#)
2. [The Road to a Jumbo Mortgage Was Supposed to Get Easier](#)
3. [Patent Law Battle a Boon to Lobbyists](#)
4. [Federal Mortgage Plan Falls Short, Critics Say](#)
5. [Consumer Confidence Slips as Home Prices Drop](#)
6. [Time Warner Spinning Off Cable Unit](#)
7. [A Cure-All for Jet Lag? Try Caffeine and Naps](#)
8. [Oil Price Rise Fails to Open Tap](#)
9. [The Food Chain: Environmental Cost of Shipping Groceries Around the World](#)
10. [Fed Cuts Rate by a Quarter Point, to 2%](#)

[Go to Complete List >](#)

**The New York Times** **TRAVEL**  
nytimes.com/travel

“It is clear that at least some of the authors played little direct roles in the study or review, yet still allowed themselves to be named as authors,” the editorial said.

The editorial called upon medical journal editors to require each author to report his or her specific contributions to articles. “Journal editors also bear some of the responsibility for enabling companies to manipulate publications,” the editorial said.

JAMA itself published one of the Vioxx studies that was cited in Dr. Ross’s article.

In that case, in 2002, a Merck scientist was listed as the lead author. But Dr. Catherine D. DeAngelis, JAMA’s editor, said in a telephone interview on Tuesday that, even so, it was dishonest because the authors did not fully disclose the role of a ghostwriter.

“I consider that being scammed,” Dr. DeAngelis said. “But is that as serious as allowing someone to have a review article written by a for-profit company and solicited and paid for by a for-profit company and asking you to put your name on it after it was all done?”

Although the role of pharmaceutical companies in influencing medical journal articles has been questioned before, the Merck documents provided the most comprehensive look at the practice yet, according to one of the study’s four authors, Dr. David S. Egilman, a clinical associate medical professor at [Brown University](#).

In the Vioxx lawsuits, millions of Merck documents were supplied to plaintiffs. Those documents were available to Dr. Egilman and Dr. Ross because they had served as consultants to plaintiffs’ lawyers in some of those suits.

Combing through the documents, Dr. Ross and his colleagues unearthed internal Merck e-mail messages and documents about 96 journal publications, which included review articles and reports of clinical studies. While the Ross team said it was not necessarily raising questions about all 96 articles, it said that in many cases there was scant evidence that the recruited authors made substantive contributions.

One paper involved a study of Vioxx as a possible deterrent to [Alzheimer’s](#) progression.

The draft of the paper, dated August 2003, identified the lead writer as “External author?” But when it was published in 2005 in the journal *Neuropsychopharmacology*, the lead author was listed as Dr. Leon J. Thal, a well-known Alzheimer’s researcher at the University of California, San Diego. Dr. Thal was killed in an airplane crash last year.

The second author listed on the published Alzheimer’s paper, whose name had not been on the draft, was Dr. Ferris, the New York University professor. Dr. Ferris, reached by telephone Tuesday, said he had played an active role in the research and he was substantially involved in helping shape the final draft.

“It’s simply false that we didn’t contribute to the final publication,” Dr. Ferris said.

A third author, also not named on the initial draft, was Dr. Louis Kirby, currently the medical director for the company Provista Life Sciences. In an e-mail message on Tuesday, Dr. Kirby said that as a clinical investigator for the study he had enrolled more patients, 109, than any of the other researchers. He also said he made revisions to the final document.

“The fact that the draft was written by a Merck employee for later discussion by all the authors does not in and of itself constitute ghostwriting,” Dr. Kirby’s e-mail message said.

The current editor of the journal *Neuropsychopharmacology*, Dr. James H. Meador-Woodruff, the chairman of psychiatry at the [University of Alabama](#), Birmingham, said he was not the editor in 2005 but planned to investigate the accusations. “Currently, we have in place prohibitions against this,” Dr. Meador-Woodruff said.

## The boom in nude vacations

Also in Travel:

[Hamptons prep work](#)  
[Ansel Adams's Yosemite](#)  
[How to stretch a dollar in Europe](#)

### ADVERTISEMENTS

All the news that's fit to personalize.

In a world of second opinions, get the facts first.

Complete coverage of Awards season



All the news that's fit to **debate.**  
[nytimes.com/opinion](#)

All the news that's fit to debate.

### Browse Local Business Services

Find businesses near you on The New York Times Business Services Directory.

[Business & Financial Services »](#)

[Computer & Telecom Services »](#)

[Food & Beverage »](#)

[Franchises, Partnerships & Manufacturing »](#)

[Health & Beauty »](#)

[Miscellaneous »](#)

[Professional Services »](#)

[Retail & Specialty Businesses »](#)

[Travel & Real Estate »](#)

In partnership with DirectoryM

[More Articles in Business »](#)

Want to save this article? Download the Times File toolbar.

Ads by Google

what's this?

**Paroxetine Lawsuits**

National Paroxetine Attorney. Lawsuits Commencing Now.  
jrobertdavis.com/Paxil

**Gas Magnet Lawsuit**

Bought A FuelMax Product? You Can Request A Refund. Visit Us For Info  
FuelMaxLitigation.com

**Research Litigation**

New! Stop Lawsuit Abuse Today. Get Facts & Information. Take Action...  
www.InstituteForLegalReform.com

**Tips**

To find reference information about the words used in this article, double-click on any word, phrase or name. A new window will open with a dictionary definition or encyclopedia entry.

**Past Coverage**

- [Vioxx Settlement on Track as 44,000 Sign Up \(March 4, 2008\)](#)
- [Merck to Settle U.S. Claims for \\$671 Million \(February 8, 2008\)](#)
- [SIDEBAR; In Vioxx Settlement, Testing a Legal Ideal: A Lawyer's Loyalty \(January 22, 2008\)](#)
- [Lawyers Seek to Alter Settlement Over Vioxx \(December 21, 2007\)](#)

**Related Searches**

- Vioxx (Drug) [Add Alert](#)
- Suits and Litigation [Add Alert](#)
- Drugs (Pharmaceuticals) [Add Alert](#)
- Research [Add Alert](#)

**INSIDE NYTIMES.COM**



**N.Y. / REGION »**



From Auschwitz, a Torah as Strong as Its Spirit

**DINING & WINE »**



The Next Best Things in Sliced Bread

**OPINION »**

**Don't Fact-Check the Soul**

When it comes to songwriting, the importance of patience and craft trumps the flash of inspiration, writes Rosanne Cash.

**BUSINESS »**



Special Section: Business Travel

**OPINION »**



Letters: In '68, Protests Made a Difference

**DINING & WINE »**



Interactive Graphic: Disappearing Foods